

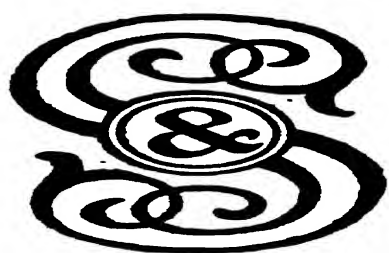
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The Juggler and the Soul



THE JUGGLER AND THE SOUL

BY
HELEN MATHERS

*Author of 'Comin' thro' the Rye,' 'The Sin of Hagar,'
'Sam's Sweetheart,' 'A Man of To-day,' Etc.*

'Proudly he answered, "Say to the Lord Ordonis,
He who can bring the dead to life again !"'

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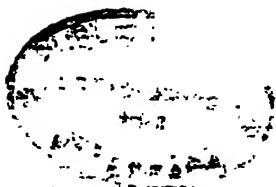
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BOOK I



NINGA



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CHAPTER I

O wedding guest ! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea ;
So lonely 'twas that God Himself
Scarce seemèd there to be.'

THE experiment was over. I stood breathless, appalled, exhilarated, yet the very force of my triumph caused me to tremble ; and, even while the pride of the creator in his own work swelled my veins, I shrank instinctively before the terrific power, and full significance of my discovery.

It needed only to be carried a step further, and then—what then ? Was it to the benefit of mankind ? Was my secret one that could be placed alike in the hands of human or lawless men with impunity ?

A sudden sense of the impiety, the sacrilege of the deed I had committed, smote me violently. I looked up, half expecting a thunderbolt to strike

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to earth one who had wrested from nature a prerogative that had hitherto been accounted divine, for I had said to the living, 'Ye shall die!' and to the dead, 'Lo! ye shall be alive again!' and, at will, I had shifted the vital spark, and the dead was the living, and the living was the dead, before my eyes.

Slowly my gaze travelled from one to the other of the two bodies lying before me, and thence to a gigantic deaf and dumb negro, who for years had assisted me in my experiments. His eyes flashed joy, his tall form towered in exultation, and, by signs, he conveyed to me his supreme satisfaction in the astounding result achieved.

The third person present was one of those beings, who unite perfect manual dexterity to an almost complete absence of mind; who have no instincts save those of the brute, and who are incapable of being impressed, or even of comprehending, if a miracle be enacted before their eyes. I made him a gesture of dismissal, and he put on his coat stolidly, and departed without a single backward glance at the group by the table, yet the whole world might have held its breath to gaze.

As the deaf-mute approached, and waited for me to speak, 'I became aware that my mind,

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without effort of mine, was made up. I signed to him, and, as his eyes followed the movements of my hands, incredulity, mortification and something very like scorn succeeded each other upon his face, though all of these expressions gave way to one of poignant despair, and the most cruel disappointment, as I ceased.

He answered in the same way, urging me not to bury in my breast perhaps the most brilliant discovery ever vouchsafed to a physiologist, but my decision was unalterable. ♦

I would not place this two-edged sword in the hands of those who might wield it in the service of the devil, the risks of evil were too stupendous, the certainty of good too doubtful, to be worth the awful responsibility. The day's work should be as if it had never been, and from my lips no man living should hear its record spoken.

‘You will keep inviolate all that you have seen and heard to-day,’ I signed. ‘More than this, you will forget it.’

He looked at me sullenly, and I knew that not the minutest detail of the operation he had witnessed, and aided in, had escaped him, but that all was engraved as with a stylet on the pages of his memory.

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‘Not even Mr Arthur?’ he inquired.

‘No.’

He reminded me that there had been a third witness present.

‘He understands nothing — he remembers nothing,’ I said: ‘and as for these’—I gazed downwards—‘you will dispose of that; but this’—and I gave him certain minute instructions that I knew would be carried out to the letter. On the threshold of the room I paused and looked back, but not at the living, but at the innocent dead. I gazed, with a pang of self-upbraiding and regret.

CHAPTER II

'Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,
And genius given, and knowledge won in vain.'

LATE that night I took lamp in hand, and, crossing the hall, came to a door that was of polished wood on the one side, of green ^{red} baize on the other, giving ingress to a narrow, white-washed passage that led to the laboratory and dissecting-room in which I spent half my life.

I turned the key and went in. All was grey, gruesome, melancholy, and everything at that moment seemed to remind me of the failures I had encountered within those four walls, while of my few successes there was no trace. I thought of Arthur, and his friend Mr Jasper, both keen and ardent students in the pursuit after truth, and both, probably, destined to the same disappointment as even now, in the moment of my greatest discovery, oppressed me. I went to the end of the desolate room, and unbolted the door

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that gave on a narrow alley, which terminated in a second door, opening on a silent back street of warehouses, and through which strange burdens were often brought, and afterwards as secretly borne away.

Through the darkness I saw Silence approaching, his teeth grinning malevolently out of his black face ; and as he came nearer, I observed something alert and unusual in his carriage ; there was more of the man, and less of the tool and humble instrument of science than I had hitherto perceived in him, though before my stern gaze he lowered his eyes, and walked more humbly.

I was satisfied, however, with the thorough completeness of the arrangements I had left to him ; and when, as I passed out, he asked me if Mr Arthur were expected soon, I answered, 'To-morrow,' the extravagant joy he displayed almost effaced from my mind the impression he had just given me.

'Mr Jasper accompanies him,' I added, not waiting for the look of hatred that I knew would cross the deaf-mute's face, and yet, so far as I knew, he had no more reason than had I for his repugnance to Arthur's friend.

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Were we both jealous of the influence Mr Jasper had so easily acquired over the bright, careless lad? That he had not led Arthur into mischief, though half-a-dozen years his senior, and probably a lifetime ahead in knowledge of the world, I knew, and the ardour for study that he seemed to have breathed into him, was distinctly to the benefit of the younger man. They had met accidentally in a Paris hospital, and the identity of their pursuits had at once brought them together, and thenceforth held them shoulder to shoulder in that eager search after the unknown which devours some of the finer, ay, and the baser sort of man, in his youth, when his soul is not utterly quenched within him.

Mr Jasper had been born and bred in India. So much he told me, but no more: and of his relations, if he had any, he never spoke, and as I never heard him allude to money, being apparently neither troubled by the lack nor the burden of it, I concluded him to be affluent.

And yet—and yet I seldom took Mr Jasper's hand—so long, so taper, so superlatively silken to the touch that it slipped through my fingers like the folds of a woman's satin gown—without

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feeling an inward recoil from him that my reason refused to ratify.

He was an opium eater, true, but within bounds, and no signs of the degradation of the accursed habit had as yet begun to show upon him. His mind was remarkably serene and clear, the equipoise of his faculties perfect, and his flawless health showed itself in a palpable joy in the mere fact of living that gave a peculiar charm and vitality to his companionship.

Yet, to my mind, beneath all the refinement of manner, a cruel and sensual nature lurked. It never showed itself to me, but I believed it to be there, and it was partly because he had become to me a fascinating study that I did not oppose his constant stay at my house.

But Arthur's path and his must diverge, and widely, before long. The one would in time put on the harness of the working surgeon, the other would continue the experimentalist, and the seeker, prosecuting his studies, possibly far on into middle life, unless domestic affection or some stronger attraction drew him out of the orbit in which he travelled.

Sometimes I found him watching me as intently as I watched him, perhaps applying my

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lesson of life to himself, and seeing in me the future of himself, with all illusions and vaulting ambitions burned out, and the dull consciousness that, having learned but little, I had missed the real and tangible happiness that the accident of easy circumstances might have placed within my grasp.

For I had not lived my life in any sense of the word. Passive enjoyment had been mine—that which comes from cultured ease, gracious surroundings, the absence of intrusion, or irksome companionship, of worry, of anxieties for the faults and troubles of those I loved; and in my absolute independence of the world and fortune, I believed myself to hold the choicest blessing that can be bestowed on man. I had never succeeded, so envy and hatred passed me by, and calumny was silent. My friends were few, and I could do without them; but I had one real heart-interest in life, and that was centred in the young cousin who had come to my house—a soft, curly-headed rogue of six—and who had grown up before my eyes into the stalwart young fellow who was now taking his last fling in Paris before settling down to serious work.

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But to-night, with the wild thrill of joy and mastery in my discovery gone from my veins, only the chill sense of a *vic manquée* swept over me as I reviewed my past, and looked askance at my future—too late!

And that is surely one of the bitterest thoughts that can come to us, when the greying shadows of middle age are creeping upon us, when the power of enjoyment is leaving, or has quite left to us, look back and say, 'I have vegetated, or stagnated, or endured, or suffered my life; but I have not lived it, not even as a bird does, and all the sources of enjoyment, of keen virile joy in me, have been dammed up at their fountain heads, instead of overflowing and keeping as a blooming garden that which has by degrees become an arid, desolate waste.

Not to have loved, not to have suffered: such an one has never truly lived—nor had I.

CHAPTER III

‘Nature had made him for some other planet,
And pressed his soul into a human shape
By accident or malice.’

ARTHUR came back from his travels rather broader and browner than he went. Mr Jasper was neither more intellectual, nor delightful, nor handsome than he always was, yet he managed to make Arthur appear at a disadvantage, as usual.

At dinner their talk was entirely of all that they had seen or done during the past three months, and as I listened to them, I more than ever recognised how distinctly the leading spirit in all they had undertaken was Jasper, and I wondered if, when his influence were removed, Arthur would be consumed by the same ardour in the pursuit of science that now animated him.

But I soon found that though they had seen

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and learned something at the different great hospitals they had visited, they had discovered nothing, and that no word of a recent American experiment that had led to my own discovery had reached their ears.

‘We mean to be awfully busy, sir,’ said Arthur at dessert, throwing back his bright head in his old boyish way; ‘for if we haven’t seen much, we’ve got the ideas for some perfectly new experiments.’

‘But I forbid you experimenting on yourselves,’ I interrupted, remembering certain incidents that had just stopped short of absolute danger, ‘and Silence has orders to let me know if you attempt any.’

Mr Jasper and Arthur exchanged glances, whether of disappointment or offence I could not be certain.

‘It has always puzzled me, Mr Jasper,’ I said, ‘that with your intense love for Arthur’s profession, you do not enter it.’

‘I am like you, sir,’ he said, and laughed. ‘I love the work, but I hate the mechanism of the business; and I mean to return to my own country some day.’

As my glance fell on him, Arthur’s face

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clouded. He turned pale, and looked positively cold, like a child who, bold with its mother's arm around it, trembles with fear when it stands alone.

'If you go,' he said hotly, 'then I shall go too.'

But he had the grace to blush at words that sounded like madness, and soon the two went off cheerfully to bed, as they meant to begin their labours early on the morrow.

And for some days I hardly saw them, so closely they kept to the laboratory, with Silence in attendance, and his assistant, a man who merits a few words of description.

He was a gross, vacuous, round-faced creature, who ate, who drank, who understood Silence's signs, and obeyed them, but whose brain, if he had one, had probably become decrepit from want of use. He had formerly been in charge of the dead-house at one of the hospitals, until his imbecility brought about his discharge, and seen beside the Titanic form of Silence, his appearance was simply grotesque, and earned him the name of Falstaff. But this did not trouble him, and he showed as slavish an

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obedience to his superior as Silence, in his turn, displayed to Arthur, his idol.

Sometimes, and always when I thought myself least expected, I entered the laboratory, half fearing that Silence had let escape him the secret he burned to impart. Fear of me alone restrained him, and I knew that if I died, suddenly he would run riot in the knowledge that he was the sole owner of my discovery, and I hated to think of the appalling and probably misused power that would be placed in his hands.

But one morning I received a letter that put all such things for a while out of my thoughts, and engrossed my whole attention.

It ran thus :—

‘ BOMBAY, *October 12th, 1885.*

‘ MY DEAR SAUL,—I send you my daughter by the steamer that follows this mail. Of course you are married, and as you are not the man to fall in love with a fool, I know that Ninga will be in safe hands. If she doesn't behave, send her to a first-rate school, and provide her with pocket-money. I have arranged for a thousand a year to be paid to you

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for her expenses. And now, if you haven't flung this letter away in a rage before you have got so far, here are my reasons for the coolest liberty one old friend can take with another. I am dying; but dying with me is such a long and dreary business that I don't know when it may be over, and I have a horror of people sitting round watching me, and angrily thinking me a dawdle, so I am breaking up my home, and shall die among strangers. To death itself I am indifferent—it merely robs me of sensation, and, as Epicurus teaches, so long as we are, death is not; and when death is, we are not. Life has no more evil for him who has made up his mind that it is no evil not to live. For me life stopped when my wife's breath ceased, and the child who robbed her of that breath, I have always hated. If you want to be cured of your old friendship for me, think of me as Ninga's father, or get her to limn my portrait as I appear to her, and you will shut the slide of memory upon me, and cry shame upon the blindness of your youth. And yet, little as I value her love, I am not indifferent to her future. Unluckily for her, she will inherit a large fortune at my death; and also, unluckily

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for her, though she is intensely feminine, she inherits a strong will, and whatever she takes it into her head to do, whether right or wrong, she will do it. If she decides on marrying the wrong man you wont stop her; but it is precisely because I believe you will keep her out of the way of the wrong man, that I ask you to undertake her. I know how strictly you have always abstained from the wine of life—well, if you have missed the lees, you have also missed the pleasure, but you have acquired a Spartan control of yourself that must enable you easily to dominate those with whom you come in contact. And so I put Ninga into your hands, more because she is Mary's child—because I want her to be done by as Mary would have done—than because she is the daughter of your old friend. And now, good-bye. I hope that my next communication to you will be through my lawyers, who will send you my 'last instructions,' etc; but I may drag on indefinitely. We have societies for the prevention of cruelty to women and children, and to animals, but why is not one started to relieve tortured human beings of life when that life is doomed to be snuffed out slowly by progressive

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stages of agony? Farewell, and God bless you!
—Your old friend, JONATHAN.'

The letter fell from my hands, and the astonishment, akin to indignation, with which I had read the opening lines, faded, as eye to eye, and hand to hand, we seemed to stand—Jonathan and I—with the eager look of friendship that is beautiful in the eyes of young men when they look upon one another. I felt once more the pang of parting when our paths in life diverged. I remembered the gradually growing coldness of our letters when the vivid memory of each other was dimmed by years, and, with a throb of shame, I remembered how it had been I who had at last suffered our correspondence to lapse, and even to forget the very existence of the man who at that time had called forth the warmest affection of my life.

His child! She should be welcome here for his sake—but why should he conclude that I was married? Might there not be one wise man in a multitude of fools? And what place was there in a bachelor's house for a girl—possibly a spoilt one? And then I forgot the girl in thinking of her father. All that day he

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was in my mind, and haunted me in young man's guise at night, so that I rose up, restless and sad, with a half-formed plan that I would establish his child here with my housekeeper, then depart myself to be with the lonely man when he died. But Arthur was here, and so, for that matter, was Mr Jasper, and I knew, on deliberation, that I must remain at my post.

Meanwhile—for she might arrive almost any day now—I saw my housekeeper, Mrs Shakel, about the necessary quarters to be prepared for her, and the good old woman was astounded, and would have expressed herself shocked had she dared, while in the corner of her eye I read plainly a foreboding and doubt that in some vital way clearly affected herself, and also me.

She coughed as she inquired the young lady's age, and when I could not tell her, she coughed the more, then ventured to stigmatize the name 'Ninga' as heathenish, and asked me what it meant; but this I could not answer, for I did not know. •

I bade her precede me upstairs, and she threw open the doors of the drawing-rooms—rarely used—and of two other rooms on the same

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floor. These were unoccupied, as my room and those of the young men were above, and the servants were at the top of the house, and the entire floor could be Ninga's.

One often forms new impressions of old things when consciously looking at them with the eyes of a stranger, and as I glanced around curiously that day, was satisfied, for space and air, light and sweetness were everywhere. It was more like a country than a town house; and Mrs Shakel was responsible for the palms and sweet-smelling plants that made old engravings seem more lovely, and the pottery that held them more serviceable and grateful to the eye, while my mother had been a woman whose taste was far in advance of her time, so that in the drawing-rooms I now entered, there was not a note of colour that required alteration.

The hangings were of tawny pink—pale yellow or orange, I should think, by candle light—and the brocade hung in lustrous, heavy folds beside the windows and over the doors; it also scattered itself over the low chairs and couches yet over all there was an unused look and I fell to wondering if Ninga were a womanly

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woman, or a woman's rights woman, and speculated a little as to what tone she would give to her surroundings.

Mrs Shakel attributed my abstracted air to dissatisfaction, and 'mentioned lace curtains, silk cushions, etc, as if they meant structural alterations.

'And lots of flowers,' I said; yet, with a cynical thought to myself of how all men credit women with a passionate love for flowers and children—a downright fallacy, as many women hate both, greatly preferring diamonds.

'Of course, sir,' said Mrs Shakel; and then I left her to find Arthur.

As I shut the swing-door behind me, the contrast between the luxury I had left behind, and the gruesome realities of life, or, rather, death, that I was approaching, struck me forcibly. Jonathan's daughter must not pass that door, I resolved; and yet, if she were curious, after the manner of her kind, she would probably never rest[•] until she had, and made herself miserable.

As I went in, the group of figures about the table, the light, a hundred little details, reminded me of the last experiment here upon which I

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had been engaged, and, in the the weary disappointment of the three faces turned upon me, I seemed to recall the more vividly, the exultant joy that had flashed from Silence's eyes to mine in the delirium of success.

When they were at liberty, I told Arthur that I was the owner of a new ward, who would arrive almost immediately.

'A ward, sir?' said Arthur, preoccupied and dashed by his failure. 'That will be a nuisance to you, won't it?'

'That depends on herself,' I said.

Arthur stared, and his mouth took the form of whistling.

'Is it a young lady?' he said.

'Yes.'

The two young men looked at each other, then at me, and smiled.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Arthur, 'but you look rather—rather young to be a guardian, you know. And, of course, you will have to take her about, and all that. You won't expect us to do it, for Jasper and I hate girls!'

I wondered what Silence would say. His one object of idolatry on earth was Arthur, and his

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jealousy of everyone who approached him, knew no bounds.

‘But perhaps you will both like this one,’ I said, looking from one to the other; and then it struck me that I had never heard either of them discuss women, or seen them in the company of any, and that the extent of their susceptibility to, or hard-heartedness towards, the fair sex, was quite unknown to me.

‘Shall you get a duenna, sir?’ said Arthur, with something irritating in his eye that reminded me of Mrs Shakel.

I laughed out. The young men joined in, and I went away with a sardonic thought that perhaps Miss Ninga might some day read one or both of these conceited young men, who did not like girls, a lesson.

CHAPTER IV

‘What if her guardian spirit ’twere?
What if she knew her mother near?
But this she knows, in joys and woes,
That saints will aid if men will call,
For the blue sky bends over all.’

THE ship was due. As I drove to meet it, I began to think, for the first time, not of my friend’s daughter, but of the girl herself.

She should be a creature of fog and shadow, of mist and cold, if she would be in mood with the day, and the colour of her surroundings; and I wished for different weather as I left the city behind me, and found myself driving through strange places, and the very strangest people that I had ever seen.

When we neared the docks, the curious sense of silence, the long, barren distances, the pallid electric light, waving from afar its signal, all wove a species of charm around me, in

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which I seemed to glide forward noiselessly, and lose all sense of boundaries in illimitable space.

I roused myself with a start to find that the carriage door was open, that we were outside an inn, and my coachman was leaning down to ask me if he should put up the horses, as the ship was not expected in for two hours ; it was even possible that the fog would prevent her getting in at all that night.

I was presently shown to a great, dreary upper room, ready laid for half-a-hundred feasters, not one of whom, thought I, will ever come. There was no fire, and the faint light from a distant pair of candles served but to accentuate the gloom, and added still further to the feeling of unreality that had possessed me since I left the city behind me.

As alternately I paced the *salon*, or looked out at the strange chasms, and ghostly gleams of water that the electric signal from time to time revealed, a sudden feeling of impending misfortune overwhelmed me. I felt as one bent upon a hopeless errand, as a man may who goes knowingly to meet his own dishonour, or some bodily harm ; as one who feels elements

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of crime and danger violently sweeping over his soul and mingling with the peaceful current of his life, yet is powerless to stand aside from the engulfing flood.

Pshaw! I was upset by the weather, made nervous by want of sleep, and some anxiety about my new charge; though even that was ridiculous, for what had I to fear from a laughing, apple-cheeked girl, whom I could suit easily with a lover or a school, according to her deserts?

No; the peril could not come from her. That I had been in some danger lately of sinning grievously, I knew, and a spiritual warning not to use the fearful knowledge I had acquired would not have surprised me; but I had received none. My own judgment had settled the question, owning no interposition from without, no cowardly qualms from within.

Twice before in my life had I felt such an influence as this, and each time it had come to warn me of a hidden danger, and I had hearkened, and been saved. And what was the message spoken to me now? For whether breathed into the air, or out of the earth, or conveyed like fire through the blood in my veins, I heard the

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words, 'Go back! go back! Let the ship and my daughter be!'

Then seemed I to step out bodily from my every-day self and habit, and become the wild Cumberland lad who had been a dreamer of dreams, a seer of visions, and who had imbibed superstition with his mother's milk. Once more, with elastic step, I trod the moor, and gazed at the fell, that, rugged and beautiful in the moonlight, rose beside me; then saw, coming slowly to meet me, a black figure showing against the blue arch of the sky, and seeming to move midway between heaven and earth.

In spirit I rushed to meet it, as in the flesh I had done a thousand times; but it seemed to recede as I advanced, yet not so swiftly but that I gained upon it, and, crying out 'Jonathan!' would have seized its arm. But what was this? Moor, fell and sky had vanished, I was standing in the tawdry inn-room, and yonder—oh, my God, how did he enter here?—stood my old friend, with pale palms outstretched as though he would warn me back. I had conjured him up, and he had done my bidding; yet I had no power to stretch out my hand in greeting, or call him by name, I could only strive to read the message

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in his eyes, to make out the shape of the muffled, crouching thing behind him, that he seemed to be trying to shelter, and hide from my gaze.

And then, though how conveyed to me I know not, I knew that he had come to warn me against undertaking the trust he had himself imposed upon me; that he bade me flee at once from the ship and his daughter, and place myself far beyond the reach of any influence connected with himself and her.

Then the fear, the horror and the warning in his eyes faded out, and I saw a face indeed, but it was my own, in the recesses of a dark mirror before me, and there was no fear on that. Eager and recognizant, I seemed springing forward to meet a welcome guest; but, as I gazed, amazement gathered upon it, then doubt and incredulity, and lastly anger.

For I had been dreaming, the vivid imagination that had transported me to youthful scenes had o'erleaped itself, and the odd state of mind in which I was, had predisposed me to dis-tempered fancies. And yet the thrill of my blood, the mere personal joy at beholding what was once so dear to me, yet lingered, and convinced me that, whether in the flesh or the spirit, I

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had seen my old friend, and that he had spoken to me face to face.

‘Beg pardon, sir,’ said my coachman’s cheerful voice beside me. ‘The fog’s thicker than ever, and she won’t be in to-night. Shall I take you back to town, or keep the horses here, and drive the young lady up in the morning?’

In the moment of hesitation that the man did not notice, I decided my destiny.

What I should have said was, ‘Drive the young lady to the world’s end—anywhere but to me!’ What I did say was, ‘Wait, and drive the young lady home in the morning.’

CHAPTER V

•
' If, when she appears i' the room,
Thou dost not quake, art not struck dumb,
And in striving this to cover
Dost not speak thy word twice over—
 Know this,
 Thou lov'st amiss ;
 And to love true
Thou must begin again, or love anew.'

SUCH a burst of laughter rushed up the stairs to meet me, as suggested a riot among the maids of the house, but it served also to disperse the fog, and provoked an answering smile from me, for I had never felt in better spirits, or more ready for breakfast in my life, than on the morning that followed my visit to the docks.

But the breakfast-room was empty, or so I thought, until something bright, moving beyond the edge of the white table-cloth before the fire, fixed my attention, and I went round to see what it might be.

It was only the back of a girl's head, with two white kitten's paws planted firmly in a loose,

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warm thickness of hair, and the kitten itself, I suppose, was rubbing its nose against hers, as on a nearer approach I could see nothing but its tail.

Now, I loved my cats. There was no surer sign of old bachelorhood upon me than this affection, that everyone in the house respected from Arthur downwards; and if a paradise for cats could be made in a London home, I had made one here. A mother and daughter lay on the hearthrug, their bodies twined into a circle of soft fur, of grace, and of absolute sensuous enjoyment, the younger with a pretty paw outstretched over the elder's body; and it was the descendant of the pair that had pounced upon the girl in the shabby brown frock, and held her imprisoned in a game of romps that seemed to afford as keen delight to the one as the other.

I sat down, and looked at the rompers, at the girl's brown stockings, and little feet that kicked hither and thither in her sport; at the two pretty heads that rubbed, and dodged, and chased each other, mingled with bursts of purest gaiety from the one, and purrs of ecstatic delight from the other, till at last I laughed also.

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‘Kit!’ I said, and down went a paw, and a minute countenance—saucy, startled, and innocent—was turned upon me, revealing another, very like it, but with eyes bluer than the kitten’s, and with less consciousness of alarm in them.

I wished that I could have painted the pair; but they did something better—they photographed themselves on my memory, and are there still.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the girl, and the kitten lifted a hesitating paw, and dropped it with a soft pat upon her cheek, ‘I did not hear you come in; and—and—you are Mr Arthur?’

I laughed, wondering how Mrs Shakel came by her relative—for this must be she. The old lady had asked me yesterday if her niece, who was passing through town on her way to become a governess, might sleep the night at my house, and of course I had said, yes.

‘You like kittens?’ I said.

She looked at me gravely; then, with the little creature curled up softly round her throat, sat down in the easy-chair opposite, and looked at me again.

‘Mrs Shakel said you would be down last,’ she said, ‘but you are the first. I want to see *him*.’

‘Mrs Shakel’s master?’

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She nodded.

‘Is he very old, and cross, and strict?’ she said.

‘Did Mrs Shakel tell you so?’

‘Is he?’ said the girl.

‘*Did* she?’ said I.

She disdained to reply, and delicately scratched the kitten’s head. Just then the servants came in with breakfast, and I observed that they looked very kindly at my uninvited guest, and that she looked back very pleasantly at them.

As the door closed, she jumped up, quite forgetting her dignity.

‘Oh, I *am* so hungry!’ she said; and dropping the kitten on its mother’s back, she ran to the table, and sat down.

‘Do you like much sugar in your coffee?’ she said ‘or do you drink tea?’

But I was as busy over the contents of a silver dish, as she was over cups and saucers, and had not time to reply.

‘Did you hear me *speak* to you, sir?’ she presently inquired, with great majesty.

‘Yes, miss, I heard. When you’ve answered my question, I’ll answer yours. Did your aunt tell you that her master was a cross old curmudgeon?’

‘My aunt?’ she said, looking completely puzzled.

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‘Of course—Mrs Shakel,’ I said.

‘Oh!’ said she, and put her finger to her lips and looked at me with all the colour spreading over her face, and then she burst out laughing in a very impertinent way.

It was so that Arthur and Jasper caught us, she looking at me and laughing, as if I were the most ridiculous object in creation, which perhaps to her young eyes I was.

Arthur stepped back with an exclamation ; then came forward, and went up to the girl with outstretched hand.

‘I had no idea you had arrived,’ he cried. ‘We heard you could not possibly be here till mid-day.’

‘This is Mrs Shakel’s niece, Arthur,’ I said, as she pushed her chair back, and ducked him the most formal, respectful little curtsy in the world.

‘Sugar, sir?’ she said, as she sat down again, turning upon him a face that you could not have matched for mischief in the three kingdoms.

She had an answer from him, and one from Jasper, who was looking at her very oddly and intently; but though they got their coffee deftly served, I received none.

‘Some coffee, please,’ I said.

‘Yes, sir. Do you like much sugar or little?’

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But I seemed not to hear her, I was speaking to Jasper. Presently she brought me my coffee-cup; it contained neither milk nor sugar, and I saw Arthur look at us in a puzzled way as I fetched milk-jug and sugar-basin, and helped myself, but my adversary soon claimed his attention by asking him if Mr Saul were not coming down to breakfast to-day?

‘Mr Saul?’ said Arthur. ‘There’s nobody here of that name.’

‘I mean Mrs Shakel’s master,’ she said, frowning. ‘Oh, how stupid everybody is this morning!’ and she turned her back on Arthur, and looked eagerly at Jasper, as if hoping to find him less of a fool than the rest.

But even as she opened her lips to speak, something—either the expression of his face, or his eyes—repelled her; the sensitive face changed, and she drew back and looked away.

‘*That’s* Mrs Shakel’s master!’ said Arthur, pointing to me.

‘That’s Arthur!’ she said, stoutly.

But the colour rose, and rose in her face; till suddenly she tossed her little apron over her head, and ran swiftly out of the room.

‘What a wild little creature!’ said Arthur,

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looking at the door as if it had shut out something uncommonly pleasant.

‘What a minx!’ cried I.

But Mr Jasper, who had gone to the window and stood looking out, said nothing.

CHAPTER VI

‘With light heart may she rise,
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice.’

AFTER breakfast, I went to Mrs Shakel’s room. A plain, shy girl, in a purple gown, got up as I entered, and made me a curtsy.

‘I will call my aunt, sir,’ she said, and disappeared.

I stood confounded. Who, then, was the minx that had refused me milk and sugar in my coffee? It could not be Ninga.

‘The young lady would not have you disturbed, sir,’ said Mrs Shakel; hurrying in; ‘she got off much earlier than any of the other passengers, and, finding the carriage there, came on at once.’

In the good woman’s face were none of the small acidities, blinks and deprecations that had lurked there when first I heralded Ninga’s advent, and I could see that the girl had already made one firm friend in the house.

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‘You should have let me know,’ I said ; then went in search of her.

Cheerful voices guided my steps to the drawing-room, where I found both the young men doing the honours, and Ninga so engaged in admiring everything, that she did not even hear me come in. I observed that the flowers delighted her most, and that then she looked about for bookshelves, and a piano, and next her brightness seemed all at once to vanish, and her head drooped.

‘It is all much too good for me,’ I heard her say to Arthur ; ‘and I was so rude to him ! But I expected to see somebody quite old, like father.’

‘Mr Sabine is just forty,’ said Jasper’s pleasant voice ; ‘but he is as young in spirit, and has seen as little of the world, as if he were twenty.’

‘I prefer young heads on old shoulders to youthful wiseacres,’ said Ninga, rather sharply ; then turning, she saw me, and paid me the tribute of a blush.

Now, I have seen women blush with such painful violence, such crude, unlovely colour, as to produce in me a shock of positive pain ; but one, at least, I know, in whom the soft rose-tint glows

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like the chalice of a flower through which the sun is shining, and that woman, or girl, is Ninga.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ she said. ‘I was very rude and—and disrespectful; but Mrs Shakel told me that some young men were here, and I thought you were one of them.’

‘Sandy-haired people never look their age,’ I said lightly, as her little slim hand lost itself in my grasp; ‘but we feel it all the same. So you like your rooms? I have been playing eaves-dropper, and heard you say so.’

‘They are delightful,’ she said softly; then looked beyond me, her eyes dilating as at some startling sight, and I turned to see Silence standing in the doorway.

Always terrific of aspect, he looked more than usually forbidding then, and jealousy blazed in the eyes he turned upon the young pair standing beside me. In Ninga he saw a future claimant to Arthur’s affection, more powerful even than Jasper himself; and while angry at the man’s folly, I could not but feel pity for the suffering entailed upon him by his ill-regulated mind.

‘He is making signs,’ said Ninga, in an awed voice. ‘Can he not speak, and what does he mean?’

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‘Mr Jasper has gone to the laboratory, and has sent Silence to ask Arthur to join him,’ I said; and then Arthur, very reluctantly, departed, and Ninga and I were left face to face.

‘I have not bid you welcome yet, Ninga; but now I do warmly, and may you be very happy with us,’ I said.

‘Those are the first words of welcome I have ever heard,’ she said, ‘and I shall never forget them. And if I could not be happy with such a home, and with you, then I should be the wickedest girl in the whole world!’

‘Had you no welcome at home, Ninga?’ I said, thinking that the young figure in the shabby frock had somehow an uncared-for look—as motherless girls often have, when there has been no other to try and supply her place.

‘My father hated me,’ she said, her voice as nearly hard as a young voice can be; ‘he loved my mother, and when she died, he never forgave me!’

‘But you might have forgiven him,’ I said. ‘Did you never try to make him love you?’

‘I had no chance,’ she said, looking down very sadly. ‘He sent me to my mother’s people when I was a baby, and I have only seen him at long

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intervals since. A short time ago he sent for me—told me that I was to prepare to go to England, and I am here.'

'Did you wish to come?'

'No. And yet—do you believe in warnings, Mr Saul?'

I started.

'Why do you call me that?'

'Father has a portrait of you by his writing-table. It has hung there ever since I can remember. Underneath it is written 'Saul.' I always thought of you as Mr Saul, and I shall call you that, and nothing else!'

'So you did not know me by the portrait?' I said absently.

'No. It has a cross look. You are only stern.'

'Since when? But you asked me if I believed in warnings. What do you mean?'

'Are you superstitious?' she said, looking at me with eyes that seemed to look through me, and beyond, to something in the far distance.

'Do you believe in spirits?'

'Of the dead?' I said.

'No—of the living; for last night I saw my father. I was lying on my berth, wondering when the fog would lift, and we should get in,

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when I felt my hand taken softly, and immediately I found myself walking by his side on a vast moor upon which nothing moved but the solitary figure of a man walking slowly towards us. As we approached it, I felt myself pierced, penetrated by a strange terror, subtly communicated to me by my father, and, crouching behind him, I shrouded myself in his cloak. Then I felt, rather than heard him say, '*Go back—go back. Let the ship and my daughter be!*' And then the moor and the vision faded; I was lying with wide-open eyes in my berth, alone, but I knew in every fibre of my body that I had been forbidden to reach the end of my journey, and that I was to return to my father by the first ship that sailed.'

She drew a deep breath, then went on again.

'I said to myself that I would not go back—he had been cruel to me; you might be kind. He had sent me off without consulting me, as something that was of no value or consequence to himself, but perhaps to be regarded by others as not altogether worthless. I resolved to see you, and if I did not like you, I would go back. I got ashore before anybody, was accosted by your coachman, and leaving my luggage to take care of itself, I started as quickly as possible. It was so warm here, and

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so cosy ; and, while I waited for you to come down, I seemed to forget everything, and played with the kitten.'

So my dream-woman—ah ! but the face had been hidden—was the child that romped with the kitten, and caught its very likeness, and she had got her warning, too, and defied it, as I had defied mine. Now, if either of us had been obedient, the object of the supernatural one would be gained, but I felt my blood rising at this mischievous intervention between mind and body, and I rebelled against the selfishness that had taken so little thought of his child's wishes, and his friend's comfort. By a mere effort of will he had despatched her to me, by a freak of the spirit he would recall her ; but if I chose to shut my ears to spiritual messages, Ninga might possibly elect to do the same and survive the consequences.

I looked at her, and read there the answer to the question upon my lips.

'Do you go, Ninga, or stay?'

She put both her hands in mine ; her young face was as strong and brave as a man's might be.

'I stay,' she said.

And she stayed.

BOOK II

JASPER

CHAPTER I

‘She whom I have praised so
Yields delight for reason, too.
Who could doat on thing so common
As mere outward-handsome women?
Such half-beauties only win
Fools to let affection in.’

THE old order has changed, and given place to the new. There is a scent of violets at our breakfast table; a sense of womanly supervision over our comforts and our manners; a fresh ripple of laughter and stir of young life through the house; and, for the first time, I have an opportunity of making, at my leisure, a study of a woman.

I have always agreed with a sailor who told me that he liked an out-and-out good woman, or an out-and-out bad one. Now, either of these are extremely hard to find, as human nature, especially female human nature, is of too complex a texture to be hall-marked as either entirely

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good or entirely bad, so I studied this one closely. She is no flirt, hardly a coquette, with as yet only an instinctive knowledge of a woman's weapons, and in no hurry, apparently, to try them, and to the young men, whom she calls 'the boys,' she displays a droll motherliness and dignity of which she seems quite unconscious, and it is only by her eyes that I know she prefers Arthur to Jasper. She is of the sort to consider that the person she dislikes has a greater claim upon her than the one she esteems, and so is put on her mettle to display her best behaviour to him, which is not so delightful then, as when she is less careful to please.

Now, at this time you could hardly find three happier, handsomer young people than the three under my roof, for the dark shade that seemed to chill Mr Jasper's features has vanished in the atmosphere that Ninga has created around her; and she is delightful company, with the frankness of a boy's mind rather than a girl's, and a sense of humour as rare in woman, as it is conspicuous by its absence in contemporary fiction.

To coin a verb, she can fun, and make you fun too, until it is as if the very elixir of enjoyment and light-heartedness had been poured

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into your veins, and pure air, instead of a murky London fog, seems to blow around you. It is not mischief, it is not wit; it is something like a child's first laugh; it is like the magic touch that makes the whole world kin; and sometimes I think that hers may be just the influence that, coming at the right moment, may wash the black drop out of Jasper's heart, and set him free to live, and love, and suffer like other humans. But she underrates him. Where one does not like, one is apt to despise, for heart and head may go together, but seldom heart and judgment; and because she does not like him, she is in danger of treating him as the puppet he deliberately makes himself in her hands.

But to Arthur each day she develops an anxiety, a protectiveness, that reminds me of some vicarious mother of an offspring older and stronger than herself: it may be love—it is not passion, and love is seldom developed towards a slave.

For they are both her slaves; and I have noticed that a girl will drive a team of two or three lovers abreast with more consummate courage and skill than when she holds whip and reins over an unit. Also, that when a woman

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is universally adored, it is difficult to determine the degree of love felt for her by anyone of her worshippers more than another, so that at the present moment, I don't know which of the young men loves her best. Arthur is in all the agonies of a first respectable love, and not wise enough to realise that an endless succession of girls awaits him, each in her turn the woman of the moment; it is only his man's impatience that makes him long to clasp the visible morsel without a second's loss of time, and, moreover, without knowing in the least if it wants to be clasped.

And, watching them, I expected to see her, being so young herself, turn to the dark-browed, velvet-voiced man of the world, rather than to Arthur, who in brightness, if not in brain, was almost her equal. Her nature seemed to me a many-sided one, lending itself—like Nature—to many things at once, and evading all hard and fast lines instinctively, so that it might be a long while yet, before 'she was caught in the gyves of love and marriage. And yet 'like to like' comes often into my mind as I look at Arthur and Ninga, for young people grow together, and form no bad habits apart. The good

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husbands and wives are those who marry young, who mould, and are moulded easily into each other's ways, and grow to love the same things, to see with the same eyes, becoming necessary to each other from mere force of habit, and with such a pair, the inherent cruelty of the marriage tie that chains together two strangers for life is deprived of its strength; and the bond of mutual selfishness and affection, once established, may remain unbroken to the end.

But whatever might be going on in Ninga's mind, it never made her forget her courteous duties to us; and I saw that her heart and breeding went together, and how, whether in her gravity or her mischief, in her work or her play, she was genuine through and through, yet as capable of making herself into a riddle as any other woman that was ever born.

I have only seen her misbehave herself once, and that was when Silence neglected to answer some question she had signed to him. She jumped upon a chair, and boxed his ears soundly, then begged my pardon earnestly for having ill-used my chattel, and very coaxingly asked me, did I mind? I knew that by some process of feminine reasoning, known only to women, she

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held him responsible for the dark deeds that she suspected went forward in the laboratory, but in which she had never set foot, as I had put her on her parole not to go there.

I read indignation in her eyes more than once when some accidental speech, some half-word to me, escaped the young men concerning their practices there. I could see, too, that curiosity burned in her as violently as in any other female breast, though she had strength to batten down the flame before it over-mastered her.

I think she held me guiltless of assisting in their practices, for I went seldom to the laboratory now, and did little work of any kind, for mine, just then, was the relaxation of the scientific man in watching the games of a happy child, or of the woman of brains in the fripperies of her *modiste*, the natural recoil from the life of intense and uninterrupted application that I had led for so many years.

The success of that last and strange experiment, and my abnegation of its fruits, had tried me, too, more than I at the time knew, and with Ninga's presence there stole over me a feeling of rest and contentment that I had never previously known.

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And, between us, there had been from the very first, that sympathy which to some men is so valuable, but to a woman is more precious to her than all that she values most—yea, sometimes more to her than the love of her children—and upon that divine food she will thrive and blossom as the rose. Not upon earth or in heaven is there aught so perfect as absolute sympathy between two souls, as it the most nearly approaches the joy, the exquisite delight of the kiss, and the touch of love.

And yet it is not love—in its essence it is divine, impersonal; and the man or woman who is born with that mysterious power of entering fully into the joys and sorrows of those about him, carries ever in his hand the balm of Gilead to pour out upon the toiling, suffering creatures who shall cross his path, and I suppose it was the existence of this quality in Ninga that smoothed even crabbed faces into smiles when she walked abroad, and caused her to be followed with kindly looks that had no envy in their wistful admiration.

And for her—I think that just then her life touched halcyon point. She had no women to worry her—no troubles—only three men to please,

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and to look pretty for (which she *did*), and with never an idle moment on her hands, which is precisely what a woman is born for. Hers was that pure, sensuous enjoyment (the recoil of a highly-strung nature condemned to a cold and tyrannous rule without love) that does not admit of condensed thought, it appreciates kindly its present joys, and only remembering the past as a wolf howling outside its windows, takes no thought for the morrow that so soon will be to-day.

‘I fear I have a pleasure-loving nature,’ she said one day to me; ‘but I love it all—the rapid movement behind fleet horses, the fresh wind, the smell of flowers, the sound of music, that gives me pain more exquisite than any joy. I love the swift exchange of thought—of follies, even, if you will. I love to eat my food at a table made beautiful by taste; but I fear there is no repose, no strength in me, for I have no resources in myself, and I could not bear to live alone, or without love, for oh,’ she added, with a tender blush, ‘we poor women cannot live without it!’

Afterwards I recalled that speech, and knew how she had belied her own powers. But then,

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I saw only her fresh mouth, her eager eyes, and the satin of her rich hair — all, as it were, ‘almost new.’

She had long ago discarded the brown frock, and, acting upon our combined advice, had commenced by arraying herself in the fruits of our selection, but with such disastrous results, that one day she asserted her capacity to choose for herself, and has looked all that she ought, ever since.

Clothes are never unimportant—many a man’s heart has been made hot or indifferent by this and that trifle, since, as every woman has her own distinct and peculiar charm, she should know how to choose, and subordinate colour and material to it. And I must confess to taking pleasure in all the refinements and elegancies of a young girl’s toilette, and Ninga’s little *minauderies* and pretty surprises afforded me the keenest delight. In a middle-aged woman, or upon a middle-aged shape, how foolish and tasteless would they appear; and it is with a sudden bound that I, who when young, hated young people like myself—and adored greybeards, now leap to the other extreme, and find youth and its vagaries profoundly interesting.

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Now when things go thus, when all the currents of life flow in one full clear stream, and existence becomes a long drawn-out note of harmony, not suffering, you may be sure that trouble is at hand; and, as Ninga said one day, 'Earthquakes always follow delightful weather.' But time passed, and they did not come, so that we congratulated ourselves, but softly, so that Fate should not hear, and remember us.

CHAPTER II

‘All thy pretty ways,
Thy music and thy prattle, thy snatches of old lays.’

OFTEN of fine mornings, Ninga would look at me coaxingly, and taking my hand in her little gentle one, say,—

‘Mr Saul! you must come out—walk, take more exercise — being so scientific makes you a little—just a little, narrow-minded and selfish, for books and experiments are not everything. There is Nature, who is always different and always lovely, and, however one may be off other food, one has always a stomach for her—and you neglect her shamefully.’

And if I urged pressing engagements with Silence, she would proceed to tell me I was much too groovy, and that I should turn into a paper-moth, and fly about second-hand bookshops when I died. After which she would

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gravely exhort me to cultivate an entirely fresh set of muscles, or go and shoot big game, if I would promise not to shoot myself (for so gentle a mortal, she could be astonishingly saucy, not to say impudent, though that is a bold word, and^o very far from suiting Ninga), and go in for billiards, not bodies, she would conclude nastily, for she had grown suspicious of what went on behind that door she was forbidden to pass, and often her eyes would flash indignantly at the three of us when really we had done nothing at all, and on the other hand, be very kind to us, when we had come straight from the cruel work. After a while she began to find fault with my clothes, and finally persuaded me to take her to my tailor, where she chose my clothes with excellent good taste, and actually made me go to be fitted, too, giving me no peace till I had let Mrs Shakel rout out all my old ones, and give them to Silence, though, when Arthur begged her to take *him* in hand, she was very scornful at his expense, 'For boys,' said she, 'are too particular about their coats, and most of them carry their smartness outside instead of in, unlike Dr Saul.' And it was so new to me to

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be ordered about by a midge of a girl, for, with all her pretty airs and tip-toeings, she could not quite reach my shoulder (everyone of us Sabines being tall and strong), that by degrees, I passed from the student's colourless life to the out-door one in which Ninga's soul delighted, and many a mile we walked and talked together, she putting a heart into my life that had never been there before.

I looked ten, and felt twenty years younger, than when she had come to us with her light, bright ways, her gushes of song, the all pervading atmosphere of womanliness that she had brought into the house, for she had a perfect genius for home, and was of the old-fashioned order of girl who thought she should keep the best of herself for those she loved, not for the outside world that she despised; and so long as she made us all happy, was happy herself.

She was never rough—often delightfully impertinent, most of all to me, but never sharp—emphatically of the old order of women—gentle, charitable, reticent in all serious matters, loving to tend rather than be tended, content to lean on man, and be petted and protected, entirely satisfied to be just a woman.

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It had been by no means an unhappy house, only, as she quaintly put it, a little selfish (for she vowed all science was selfish, and not a little cruel), but now she had let the sunshine in, and filled it with laughter and perfume—for flowers followed 'as naturally on her steps as if she had been late spring.

She loved the sweet monotony of 'the trivial round, the common task,' the pleasant household duties that are a delight to a brisk woman, who loves to make other people happy, and give them the best of creature comforts, yes, even to feed the brutes, and she never ceased to thank her stars that she had some big strong men to look after and be kind to her, and it was very amusing to hear her bless herself for not being clever.

'Because,' she used to say, 'if a woman is very kind to a man and gives him everything he likes best, which is herself, and makes his home happy and comfortable, he has no right to expect any more, and the woman who has to pay for a husband with her brains is a monster who should not be allowed to exist.'

I never saw anyone with so great a horror of publicity as Ninga, and when I tried to gather

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a little scientific and literary society (which was all I knew, and the young men had never brought anyone home) about her, she would have none of it, and begged and prayed that no visitors might be admitted. She felt so sorry for the poor women who wrote books; it must be so dreadful to have a big magnifying glass turned on you when you went abroad, and to feel that all your little physical blemishes were being commented on. 'For, only think,' said she, 'if the powder had not happened to stick on your nose,' and she stroked her own delicately as she shot a mischievous glance at me with her head, bird-like, on one side.

'But you don't use powder?' I said, in my character of schoolmaster to these young people, a rôle I got heartily to detest.

'No, but I *shall*,' said Ninga, with the certain and awful conviction of one who has sense enough to know that she will not be always maying; no, nor her skin either.

But this was only when she was in a wicked mood, though I noticed she always read men's books, and if she took up a woman's, declared it to be all wrong, as it was bound to be, when men wrote from experience, and real knowledge

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of the world, and the women for money, 'because they had no husbands, no one to work for them, and no man has ever loved them for themselves, poor things! And the more talent and the less genius a woman has, the more noise, and the less progress she makes.'

Even in religion, the one field in which she ought to distinguish herself, her entire absence of initiation is shown by the fact that of the six hundred religious sects whose history has been traced, only seven have been founded by women! Why is this? Because religion is a poor substitute for love, because she only puts half her imagination into it, because to pray is not to shriek, and it is only when a woman is disappointed of love, that she scratches, and shrieks and her mordant cries of pain are heard, and listened to by man.

But to Ninga, the sight of a woman brandishing above her head the bit of money she has made out of it, when a successful man can double and treble it in a day, and who *goes on* doing so, while she, poor soul, her brief flare of publicity or vogue over, sinks back upon the dunghill she has mistaken for Parnassus, was painful and horrible, and she shrank visibly

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from the female *blagueurs* and braggarts who shouted out their wares, self-crowned with laurels filched from long dead but not forgotten authors, while men of real genius, simple, manly and modest, hung their heads, and for the sake of all women, looked on, downcast and ashamed.

And every day you see in women totally emancipated from all masculine discipline, and control, or surrounded by miserable flatterers, how odious, how altogether unbearable they become; success but maddens, instead of improving them, and the greater pity and kindness for others that their considerable talents should teach them, is turned into vulgar vituperation and spite of the worst kind.

If so great, why so little magnanimity? Why jeer and point with cruel finger at the poor wretches who slip and slide down the slopes that lead up (she says) to her inaccessible altitude?

Alas! that it should be so, but the vilest portraits of woman are drawn by sordid-minded women; it is in the chivalrous hearts of an Anthony Hope, or a Marion Crawford, that we must look for the old romantic, worshipped ideal of what woman once was, and still may be.

To be the little wife of a great man was

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infinitely preferable to being the great, or say notorious, wife of a little one, because she did not think women were meant to be great or rich, but to be happy, and stay at home while their big men went out, and foraged, and fought for them.

She had no mind to be a prisoner who, with sweat of brow and failing heart, makes a nice, smooth road for others to walk in. There was only one safe road, and that was love.

CHAPTER III

‘And if I love thee, what is that to thee?’

I DID not learn this all at once, of course, but at odd times when we were walking, or on occasions when she would bring her frivolous needlework to my study, and mix it up with my books, though on occasion she could sit like a little mouse in my pocket while I read.

She would even darn my socks, much to the surprise of Mrs Shakel’s maids, but she looked shocked and offended when Arthur plaintively begged her (just to own some of her delicate little stitches) to mend a hole in his glove; and he never ventured to ask her again.

Jasper asked no such favours; he was too wise. Sometimes, watching them, and recognising the genuineness of his passion for her, which (and to me that is ever a strange thing in a man) her indifference but fanned the more fiercely, I wondered that she should prefer Arthur with

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his casual ways, his boyish enthusiasms, and sunny youth, to this man in whom, almost, if not quite, burned the fire of genius, in whom certainly was that spark of self-confidence which lifts a man shoulder high above all counsellors, and makes him guide, with daring and stern purpose, the helm of his own fortunes, ay, and that of others.

And I knew so well, how it is always the best order of woman that attracts the worst order of man, that not the sympathetic lover who understands and studies her, takes the direct road to her heart, but often the one who is coarse, wicked and unworthy who ensnares her, and it is precisely of such men that the others are jealous, rarely of the good.

But here was the exception, or else her instinct was too true, for I noticed that she was never at her best with Jasper, as she was with us; that she did not let herself go, and show all that was in her mind when he was present; that she tried to be less attractive, if such a thing might be, for, thank God, there are women who deliberately refuse to foster the weak side of a man's nature (as apart from love), who must win a man on the best side of him, or not at all, and if, after repeated borings, the gold do not come to

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light in his character, then they will not take the dross, and concern themselves about him no more.

And though his love for her then was very great, and probably the first sincere passion of his life, it probably would not last, for he was one of those, who, having looked on Aphrodite's face, will look, and look again at her under more than one aspect.

But all this was not clear to me then. To myself I was a middle-aged man, looking on at the play of three young people, myself entirely out of it; and sometimes it seemed to me, that it was a race between Arthur and Jasper, and she, for whom they ran, looked on, encouraging neither, the strangeness of which did not strike me then, for I was blinder and stupider than the dead.

In contrasting the two men, it more than once occurred to me that the one was all bark, the other all bite, that Arthur's mercurial temperament was as entirely lacking in Jasper's tenacity and invincible will power, as Jasper was in the other's frank, noisy charm; but I think that if I had been a woman, without a woman's instincts, I should have preferred the virility of the fighter,

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the man of action and primitive passions, to the fair-haired, blue-eyed lad, who wore his heart on his sleeve for all to peck at.

Only sometimes I would find Jasper watching me, especially when Ninga was by, very queerly, with a sort of impatience too, as when one sees an ignorant hand laid on a spring that has only to be touched to reveal a treasure, and his looks and their meaning all came back to me afterwards, when it was, by an eternity of suffering, too late.

And Jonathan, whom I had loved, often looked at me out of the face of his child, whom I loved better. Many a face that, at first sight, we believe to be a stranger's, is, all at once, dear and delightful to us, because we are already familiar with it, or one very like it; and when she looked more than usually like my old friend, I would talk to her of him, and try and soften the heart that had only one hard place in it, and that for him.

But if I persisted she would end by calling me Dr Sabine, which was a sign of deep offence with her; and one morning, when we were walking together, she fairly astounded me by the bold doctrine that we ought not to be expected

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to love our parents unless they deserved it, because, though parents deliberately chose their own children, the children had no voice in the selection of their parents, or very often they would choose differently!

‘Ninga! Ninga!’ I cried in horror, but there was no moving her, and at last I asked her the stupid question, would she have selected *me* for that honour, were she given the chance?’

‘Oh no, *no!*’ she cried passionately, then turned aside with a blush; and were those tears on her lashes, when presently she began to talk of other things?

But I would not answer, and asked how I had failed in my duty to her, at which she tossed her pretty head, and said duty was not everything, and then she stumbled in her speech, and something put it into my head to ask her (she being so disdainful to all men here) if she had left any lovers behind in India?

‘Not one!’ she said, with an indescribable look that implied she would have made short work of them if she had, and suddenly it dawned upon me that Miss Ninga was a flirt.

‘And pray,’ I said sharply, ‘what do *you* know of love?’

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She looked at me with a delightful, even shameless, air of innocence (we were walking in the Park) and said, 'Pray, what do you?'

And to that I made no answer, unless my wrinkles (for as yet I had no grey hairs) did for me.

'I know,' she said, as we moved together, walking swiftly, and with, for me, at least, a corresponding vigour of thought that was new and delightful to me, after my long sedentary life, 'what every woman is wise in, though she be born blind, and dumb, and deaf, and that is the lore of her own heart—for it is the only thing in the world worth knowing well—Love.'

She pointed to the waters of the Serpentine upon which the short December sunshine lay brilliantly.

'Look,' she said, 'at the sunshine, how it soothes and calms the troubled water—just watch it smooth itself out—see how angry it grows when the clouds hide its soother! Like oil it spreads, and diffuses itself, and love is like that . . . It soothes and calms the world, and howsoever confounded with false lights, with its twin brother desire, it is the finest of all things in the universe.'

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I looked at her keenly, but her blue eyes put down the sternness of mine, for they were pure and good as any woman's could be.

'Am I not a woman?' she said. 'Can I not see? Under our roof I have three utterly different types of men to study, and—and,' she paused, and I knew then how thoroughly she had gauged Jasper. 'And I think,' she went on softly, and looking out over the water by which we stood, 'that a man's joy is in what he grasps—a woman's in what she remembers.'

'And what have you to remember?' I flashed out.

'Have I not been with you some time—plenty of time in which to accumulate pleasant memories?' said she.

'But not time in which to deliver counsels of perfections about love,' I said, with a strange roughness that startled us both, for some strange, unknown thing was speaking through me, and to its meaning I had no key. 'But I—oh yes—after all, I am a man, and I have heard (I laughed out, and the laugh was not mine) that the fulfilled impulse of man and woman to each other is the most exquisite, the most fleeting, the most satisfying of all earthly joys. It is for the

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memory of it that the sensualist charges blindly on, for the passionate hope of it, that men go through the world scanning eagerly every stranger's face they pass in the street, that they may be reminded of what once was divine to them—for Love as apart from Desire is divine . . . but to ask it to remain at that point of perfection is to ask the fruit-bloom to be in bloom for ever . . . and what of the fruit?—'

'The fruit,' said Ninga, very pale, and with blue eyes that burned, 'is in what comes after, and it is often the best. There is comradeship, identity of interests, mutual help, the company that is always dear and sweet because it is the one we love best—the certainty that houses do not matter, when our real home is in the heart that beats against our own . . . and there are the little children,' she added softly.

The sun had hid himself. . . . A chill wind blew across, and ruffled the sables about Ninga's throat, froze in me something that tried to make itself heard, understood, and could not.

She was thinking of Arthur, of course—Arthur to whom she would be as a living flame to a farthing rushlight. . . . mechanically we turned and bent our steps homeward, and quite super-

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ficially I thought to myself that it was a pity she had said such things as she did, and that she would never be quite my little Ninga again.

Presently she looked up at me, and from her speech, I think her lips were trembling as she said, 'I was reading a strange little story yesterday, and, do you know, it made me think of you?'

I asked her what it was, then my brain went on hunting for something it knew to be close by, but could not find.

'It was something like this'—her voice faltered, then went bravely on; one would have said that here was a soft, gentle creature turned suddenly into something fierce and dangerous by the sharp necessity for it to fight for its life.

'There lived once a vain, beautiful woman who took the most extraordinary precautions against being seen in the decay of death, and to that end was laid beneath a monument calculated to resist through centuries the hand of the disturber, while on the massive pedestal was engraved the line:—

"This grave, purchased in perpetuity, shall to the end of time never be opened."

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‘It chanced that in the shovelfuls of earth thrown on the coffin was a birch seed, that in darkness and silence, set itself to undo the command of this vainglorious woman. After some years a green shoot forced itself through a joint between two of the great stones, and then, during the whole of a long century, went forward the silent struggle between the living wood, and the dead stone, with the result that Nature conquered, the heavy monument was completely riven, and a stately tree rose from the very interior of the tomb that she had meant to remain inviolate to all time.’

‘Yes?’ I said, like the stolid, insensate brute that I was, for I could think of nothing but that a girl who could so discourse of love must know it well—but Arthur—*Arthur*. She answered nothing, and I could not see her face . . . it was only long after that I knew the parable had been intended for me . . . that for all my selfish, dry, scientific pursuits, the tiny seed of love, of human nature was there, and sooner or later must assert itself . . . nay, though I knew it not, some such upheaval, some such miracle as that of the dead woman’s tomb had been going forward in a soul that had so long put all

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thoughts of happiness for itself by, that it could not adjust itself easily to another outlook. And this was the first and the last unmaidenly thing in Ninga (and that for pure love) that I ever knew of her, and why she did it, and how it was more for another's sake than her own, in one of the black days of the future, I was to know.

CHAPTER IV

Scorned !—shuddered at !—yet love her still? Yes, yes !
By the deep feelings of revenge and hate,
I will still love her—woo her—win her, too !'

THE attitude of Silence towards Ninga sometimes gave me concern, for he seemed to have transferred all his hatred of Jasper to her ; and knowing that jealousy was at the root of the gigantic deaf mute's aversion, and with the spice of mischief invariably found in a true woman, Ninga fostered it by a special kindness to Arthur, whenever his body-servant and slave was by.

If my eyes often rebuked her, I secretly approved of the punishment she administered to the man, for he was growing insolent and possibly dangerous ; and, clever though he was, I resolved to dismiss him when I could find a substitute.

'Yes,' said Ninga one day, nodding her bright

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head up and down; 'he could, and would, kill me if he dared, but I don't mean to give him a chance.'

She had been pale of late, but was moving about the room with that flitting grace and brightness that is very youth itself, expressing supple limbs and buoyant heart—something a little nearer surely to heaven than earth.

'If he dares to look at you rudely, he shall go,' cried Arthur. 'Shall he not, sir?' turning to me.

'Of course,' I said; and thought of the ingratitude of young men, for Silence was as faithful as a dog could be, and I have my own theory that dogs are the souls of good men returned to earth, who in life were very human.

'No,' cried Ninga, frowning; 'he shall not go. He is useful to Mr Saul, and he is faithful—as faithful as death.'

'Other people can be faithful, too,' said Arthur, with an unusual cloud on his sunny face.

'Not women,' said Ninga, who seemed in a perverse mood that morning; and at the moment Mr Jasper came in, holding an exquisitely carved box of ebony. This he set on the table and

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unlocked, then turned it upside down, and a confused mass of white and coloured stones lay like a broken rainbow before us.

Ninga exclaimed, and drew near, and Arthur leaned over from the other side of the table, and asked his friend if he had been sacking a shop in Bond Street?

‘Their colours are beautiful,’ said Ninga, ‘but they are hard, they are cold; they are not half so beautiful as a lapful of spring flowers.’

Jasper’s face changed. Perhaps he had reckoned too much on the luxury-loving side of Ninga’s nature; perhaps he had mistaken her for one of those women whose souls never rise above *chiffons*, and he did not realise that she developed that side of her character as naturally as she developed others; they all took their turn and passed, leaving a something indestructible, untouchable, that was Ninga’s self.

He picked out a string of diamonds, another of pearls, a third of opals, and a fourth and fifth of sapphires and emeralds, and held them out to her. She balanced them on the tips of her fingers, and her colour rose a little, for she was but a daughter of Eve after all, and the spell began to work in her.

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‘I like the opals best,’ she said, gazing at the milky azure, and pink, and lilac of the sister crescents.

‘Will you honour me by wearing them, Miss Ninga?’ he said eagerly; and voice and face alike were more manly, more likeable than I had ever known them before.

Now, there are women who will take presents as naturally, and with no more thought of harm in it, as they will draw in air, but Ninga was not one of them, and she unlooped the strings from her slender fingers, and put them back on the heap.

‘I never wear jewels,’ she said, and that was true, for she had none.

Arthur had got up; there was a flush on his face, and his eyes shone as he looked at his friend.

‘Keep them for your wife, Jasper,’ he said roughly; and turned about, and went out. It was the first harsh word that had ever passed between them. So the usual cause that breaks most men’s friendships had parted these two, and of course it was a woman.

Jasper was pale, and his mouth hard, as he gathered up the confused mass of colours, and

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threw them back into the box. He shut the lid so harshly that we heard the sound of crushing stones, and Ninga sprang forward, crying, 'Oh, what a pity! They should all be in cases.'

'They take less room this way,' he said; and his voice sounded oddly, as if disappointment had taken all the body and life out of it.

'You ought to send them to your banker,' I said; 'if it became known that such stones were in the house, they would be stolen within a week.'

He shrugged his shoulders; then he, too, went out, leaving the box on the table like a second-rate Faust.

Now there are some things that a woman can do, and a man can't. For instance, as Josh Billings says, 'A man can't have his mouth full of corking pins, and talk fast at the same time;' 'A man can't rile another man till he is half mad, and then make him as sweet as honey by tickling him under the chin;' and probably a man would not scornfully refuse a gift, then immediately after, long for a surreptitious peep at it.

As the front door closed with a bang behind Mr Jasper, and he passed the window, Ninga's eyes and mine met, and she laughed, though she had

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been shy with me lately, then, drawing up a chair to the table, deliberately raised the lid of the ebony box, and looked in.

‘Stay here,’ she said, ‘in case I am tempted to steal anything,’ and soon her exclamations drew me towards her, and together we looked at the strangest, most costly and remarkable collection of jewels that surely ever came into the hands of one man.

‘They are all Indian,’ said Ninga; and indeed there was an Oriental magnificence about the stones and settings, about the unknown orders and insignia, and all manner of mysterious ornaments, of a fashion never seen in England, and Arthur came in while we were still poring over them.

‘So you have changed your mind?’ he said, looking coldly at Ninga, who was holding to her forehead a flat circlet of diamonds, from the centre of which depended a long and priceless black pearl.

‘There are nose-rings here, too,’ she said; ‘oh, what a poor figure an English duchess would cut beside an Indian princess who had all her jewels on!’

‘Jasper is going back to India at the end of

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the year,' said Arthur, his pleasant young voice roughened by jealousy; 'perhaps he can get you the title of princess out there—who knows?'

'Thank you,' said Miss Ninga, fitting on a bracelet of cat's eyes; 'perhaps he may.'

'I wish Mr Jasper would take these things away,' I said, addressing Arthur's back, as he looked out of window; 'it is not safe to have them in the house.'

'As they belong to Ninga,' said Arthur, shortly, 'it will be *your* duty to look after them, sir.'

'To be sure,' said Ninga, calmly. 'So won't you lock them up in your strong box, Mr Saul?'

I did so, when she had carefully and lingeringly put the stones away, Arthur watching her from the window, and something in his face told me then that the eager, boyish love of which I had thought so little, was in truth a matter of life and death with him, and with the jewels I locked away—strangled—some tender, trembling hopes that had lately been struggling for life in my breast.

And from that day onward, things changed, Ninga came no more to my study, and I threw her and Arthur constantly together. At first Ninga keenly resented this, but one day something—was it pride?—seemed to get the whip-hand of

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her, driving her at a rattling pace, and thenceforth she made herself charming to the boy, leaving me quite out in the cold, though she always deferred to me as master of the house. I saw Jasper knit his brows, and look questioningly at me, but in a different way to what he had done before, but I had relapsed into my usual dry ways, and at last he seemed to make up his mind that I was a scientist first, and a man a long way after, and that as I really desired to see the two young people married, the match was as good as made.

And then, whether to punish Jasper, or, as I knew afterwards, another, Ninga behaved before us all as though she loved Arthur, and if she acted the part crudely—for falseness was difficult to her—she did it with a dash and colour that deceived everyone of us, save Mrs Shakel. For women understand and read each other as men cannot, just as only a man really understands men. And so the time slipped past, but it was not till January was well turned, that the first shadow of the dreadful thing that was to come upon us fell across our threshold, and bit by bit slowly blotted out the sunshine that played about our hearth.

CHAPTER V

‘ Off, false demon,
That beatest thy black wings close above my head !’

AT breakfast one January morning, Ninga was feeding her kitten, Arthur was watching Ninga, while Mr Jasper watched Arthur with an expression that at first puzzled me, until its meaning suddenly glared out on me—it was murderish. Now, there are certain states of mind in which you see only one thing, and in pursuing it, you strike yourself blindly against whatever comes in your path; you have ceased to take heed of your surroundings, and are indeed oblivious of them. Thus Jasper was so intent upon Arthur that I had got out of his focus; he did not even see me, so that expression remained on his face long enough for me to seize it thoroughly, and to say that I was appalled, is nothing, for here were two young men living together as brothers,

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yet there was murder of heart, if not of act, between them, and the cause of it was my little Ninga.

‘Did she know?’ I asked myself, as I went out with the feeling of a man who has received a stunning, treacherous blow, and sate down before my writing-table to find, as usual, my morning letters spread out, and among them one in the handwriting of Ninga’s father, but I did not hurry to break the seal; I knew the contents, he wanted her back, and she must go. If there were any truth in the vision that had appeared to her and to me, he must have known, and felt it as we did. By every mail I had expected the summons, I knew by her pale looks on mail days that she had looked for it too, she had been downcast this very morning, and perhaps was in an agony of suspense now.

There was, therefore, no need for me to dread harm to Arthur from his friend; she would go away, choosing probably neither the one, nor the other, and the rivalry between the young men would cease, yet a dull sense of disappointment, of pain, was mine. Both in Silence and in Mr Jasper I had got a glimpse of two black hearts that saddened and affrighted me, and deeper still

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was a desolate ache and longing, the meaning of which I did not attempt to fathom.

Later I went up to her room. Would she be reading her Bible, or sewing a wristband, or engaged in one, of those gracious tasks that make a woman's presence like a perfume in the house?

But that morning she was very prosaically occupied in folding up sheets of brown paper, and rolling up cut pieces of string, like a spendthrift who, after scattering his gold, falls to a miserly counting of his farthings.

'Do you know what all this brown paper means?' she cried gaily, as I went in; 'it means *extravagance*, so when you are married, if you ask for brown paper and get it, you need not be pleased, for you will little know the amount of money that brown paper represents!'

She was standing in the middle of the room, with the January sun shedding its cold, clear light upon her, and for the moment I forgot my business, to wonder if anything more beautiful could be found in the world, than the lines of a young girl's shape, and throat, and head.

Before I could answer, Jasper came in velvet-footed behind her, and stooped to take up a

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book that lay on a chair close beside her. I had not heard him knock, and I thought his entry strange, and stranger still the look he half turned over his shoulder; but the next moment something much odder happened, and petrified me, for in putting out her hand, it touched Jasper's, of whose presence she was not until then aware. She recoiled violently, turning on him a glance that flashed a whole drama before my eyes, and the next moment he had gone, and she and I were alone together.

'Ninga,' I said sternly, 'why did you not tell me this?'

'He is your guest,' she said, looking pale and proud, 'and so am I.'

'He loves you,' I said slowly, 'and you loathe him! What has he done?'

Her breast heaved, whether with scorn or hate I could not tell, yet there was in her attitude a fear, a shrinking not in the least natural to her, and one, I thought jealously, not at all to the credit of a young and innocent girl.

And, after all, what if she should love him though her love were largely mingled with fear? For a woman's heart is a delicate thing; it will elude watching, and as unconsciously, and as

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easily hoodwink you as a cat will move in undulations of stealthy grace. And yet this was not like my Ninga.

‘You are afraid of him,’ I said, and my voice sounded harshly enough in my own ears, I think, but not so harshly as in hers.

‘If I am afraid,’ she said, and there was no colour in her face, save in her blue eyes, ‘it is not for myself, but for others’—and she took my hand and held it fast between both her own; then, as one who laughs and cries in a breath, she said, ‘You are like the gentle Heke—the splendid warrior—so brave that he could beat the English, so gentle that he was the dupe of mischief-mongers, and died of a beating from his wife! And you would run into danger because a foolish girl has nervous fancies—’

‘What danger?’ I cried, holding her hands firmly, and bending down to look in her eyes.

She grew paler yet, and I felt a shiver pass from her hands to mine.

‘Don’t you feel it?’ she said—‘that there is something strange, unnatural about him; and can’t you see’—she dropped her voice—‘that he hates Arthur, as a little while ago he hated you?’

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‘He shall go!’ I said, moving abruptly from her. ‘He is a viper born and bred, and I have been blind to house him so long.’

‘No,’ she said; ‘he must stay. Where he goes, Arthur will follow, and Arthur is only safe here. At any moment he may transfer his hatred of Arthur back to you—’

‘And you think he will harm me?’ I said lightly.

‘He may try.’

She spoke so nervously that I laughed again.

‘He shall bundle out of the house,’ I said; ‘and as to Arthur, your influence will keep him safely here.’

‘Not if Mr Jasper asserts his power,’ she said; ‘he is more than the snake-charmer—he is the snake who masters the man himself; and where he beckons, Arthur will follow.’

‘But Arthur loves you, too,’ I said, for now we were talking soul to soul, and face to face, ‘and you can beat Mr Jasper easily.’

‘But if I do not love Arthur,’ she said; ‘am I to save his soul alive, and lose my own?’

Cruelty has forced many a word from a woman’s lips that her heart would have left unsaid, and I knew that I had forced such words

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now as I looked at her. But some subtle, intangible joy in her revelations put me into that state of mind in which one might hear of every sort of disaster, yet remain serene.

‘But I must save him,’ she said; ‘you would do it yourself. If ever there were any question of Arthur’s happiness or your own, you would put him first, as you have done,’ she added, almost inaudibly.

‘And how do you propose to do it?’ I said.

‘I won’t leave Arthur,’ she said; ‘whoever strikes through him, strikes through me. Even if my father sent for me, my duty is to Arthur. I like him—I love him,’ she added, with the tears in her eyes; ‘and I will stay here to shield him from Jasper.’

Then I remembered my heavy errand, and as I looked at her the lines flitted through my mind,—

‘Empty and dark is the house without *her*—
Empty and dark through the open door.’

‘You have bad news for me,’ she said, for she could read my face as no other could, just as in her face I found all that I had missed in others.

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‘The Indian mail is in to-day, and there is a letter from your father.’

‘And he bids you send me back?’ she cried.

‘Yes.’

‘I knew that was coming,’ she said, drawing a deep breath. ‘He must have known it when he sent us each that warning; and there is danger, but it is to Arthur, not to you, or to me!’

She was staring straight before her; for the moment she looked like a woman who walks in her sleep, or whose spirit has left her; then her expression became more natural, and she spoke.

‘Will you make me go, Mr Saul?’ she said.

‘He is your father, and must be obeyed.’

‘But may one not be a law unto oneself?’ she cried. ‘Should we not live for our own conscience, and what one thinks right?’

‘You cannot always trust your own convictions—duty comes before self-government.’

My voice was cold; I spoke as by rote, for in my heart I did not think it just or right to send her back to fulfil a loveless duty towards the father who had never loved her.

I thought of her goodness—of the deep piety

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that was in her—of her gentle ways—of all that she was to us, of how little to him—and I could not bear to see the agony on the young face, half hidden in her hands.

‘Others will think differently to you, Ninga,’ I said sadly. ‘A parent’s rights come before all others.’

‘Others!’ she cried passionately. ‘What do they matter? What are they to you? It is oneself—it is something here’—she touched her breast—‘that directs you.’

I answered nothing, but took the letter from my pocket and gave it her.

It merely said that her father was convinced, from reasons he could not explain to me, and which, if explained, would probably only excite my ridicule, that he had done wrong in sending his daughter away, and wished her to return to India at once, and upon his death she would return to the guardianship of her mother’s people. He expressed much regret at having troubled me, and ended by saying that for some weeks he had been in such extremity as not even to be able to dictate the letter to summon her back.

Now in this letter there was a coldness that

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I could not but feel—had some subtle sense of my failure to him as a friend reached him?

Ninga read the letter to the end, but as she replaced it in the envelope, something that was neither gasp, nor sob, nor sigh escaped her, yet it sounded to me like the audible expression of a breaking heart.

‘*Must* I go back, Mr Saul?’

I knew that it was her last cry of entreaty—that she would never sue to me again to be the light and joy of my home—that with me rested the word that would drive her forth, a second Eve, out of what had been to her a paradise.

‘Yes; you must go.’

I tried to pronounce the words, but my lips were dry and stiff, giving forth no sound; yet a devil within me, wrestling and struggling for speech, could have rushed out with the words, ‘No; you shall stay, you shall stay, not for Arthur, but for me!’

But I uttered neither the one nor the other, only she, looking in my eyes, read her sentence there, yet I wished, as I turned away, that she had either wept or spoken, and lingered long without the shut door, straining my ears for some sound to break the deathly silence within.

CHAPTER VI

'Late, late yest'reen I saw the new moon
With the old moon in her arms ;
And I fear, I fear, my master dear,
We shall have a deadly storm.'

NINGA'S passage was taken, and Mrs Shakel, with a drip of tears between, had begun to pack her boxes, with all our little gifts to her in between.

By way of preparing us for the desolation that would follow her departure, she had withdrawn herself very much from our company during the last few days, and, save at meal times, she was always busy—or with Mrs Shakel, or—or something.

My housekeeper looked greatly troubled at this time, and her eyes, continually sought mine with a question, an entreaty that her lips did not dare to utter, or that Ninga had forbidden ; and yet, if she had dared to risk my anger, and speak out then, two lives at least had

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never been wasted, and two others spared an anguish worse than death.

I loved the good old woman who had been with me from boyhood; and when we speak of second childhood, what do we mean but that the elementary things remain,* that primitive feelings are the only real ones, and the old are wise in their contempt for the petty details and foolish hindrances of life, that with the fret and strain of it gone by, they recognise that such striving was no part of Nature, and never intended of God? The old man sitting in the sun, with his faithful ones about him, goes back indeed to the child's joy in love, in the mere delight of living, and Mrs Shakel knew well how little anything mattered, so long as the right, and not the wrong hearts came together.

During these days, Ninga's face changed—it was more beautiful than ever perhaps, but it was quite a different face to the one I knew, and Mr Jasper remained, greatly to my surprise. For he must have known himself unwelcome, but the startling news of Ninga's imminent departure seemed to have paralysed the hostility between the two young men, and now they did not think at all of each other, but only of her.

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I believe Mr Jasper thought I believed his passion for her cured, and so I was able to watch him at my ease. And soon I discovered that a secret joy and hope sustained him, how, cold and averted as were her looks and ways to him always, 'he did not despair of making her love him, and that he did not *believe* in the reality of her loathing for him.

I have seen his eyes dwell on her in dreamy, sensuous thought, there was not a charm in her, that he did not appreciate and value, and his eyes said, 'You are mine, and sooner or later I will claim you.'

But one morning, Arthur, who had remonstrated bitterly with me for sending her away, came to my room, his manly face and figure all glowing with earnest love. 'I love her, sir,' he said, 'and I believe I can make her love me in time, but what chance shall I have, if she leaves England?'

'God knows that it is not my wish she should go!' I said, while my heart sank for him, for I knew now that it was warm liking, but not love, that Ninga bore him.

'I don't want to hurry her,' he said, looking so brave and bright that many a woman might

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have hesitated before she bid him despair; 'she is so young, and hardly knows her own mind yet—except about Jasper,' he added with a curiously triumphant laugh.

'You haven't quarrelled with him?' I said anxiously.

'Oh, no! He and I are very good friends as long as he doesn't make love to Ninga; but somehow he never gets on with women; he is a man's man.'

'Is he? Well, I shall be glad when he gives some of his other friends the benefit of his company.'

'Has he been a nuisance to you, sir?' cried Arthur, remorsefully. 'I ought to have remembered that he was my friend, not yours.'

But his eyes wandered restlessly from one to another of the traces of Ninga's presence that had penetrated even here. 'What shall we do without her, sir?' he broke out. 'It will be like a dungeon without her. If only that selfish old father of hers would die, instead of dragging her back against her will!'

'He will die before long,' I said dryly, 'and then Ninga will be able to choose for herself.'

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‘Unless some other fellow snaps her up going out,’ said Arthur, gloomily; ‘who ever saw a girl like Ninga before? So lovely, so sweet, so saucy, so good. It makes my heart sink like lead to see her looking as she does now.’

‘She must go,’ I said decidedly, ‘We have not the ghost of a right to keep her here.’

‘A husband’s right comes before a father’s,’ said Arthur. I turned to look at him. He was half shame-faced, half laughing, but wholly eager, and again I realised that this might be a life and death matter to my boy.’

‘Ninga sails in a week,’ I said. ‘Do you expect to get your wooing and marriage all over in seven days?’

‘No, sir; but if I got her promise, you could write to her father and tell him; and then, in a long while—say two or three months hence—we could be married.’

‘Stop!’ I cried; ‘you are going too fast. Where would you live—and on what?’

‘Why, here, sir, of course, and with you,’ said Arthur, promptly; ‘and on what I shall make out of my profession, of course!’

I laughed, but not very mirthfully.

Ninga single, was herself, and mine; Ninga

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married would be Arthur's; and though I tried to picture her thus, I could not.

'Go now,' I said; 'I am busy.'

Yes,' he said; 'and I will go straight to Ninga!'

After he had gone, I sat alone with my thoughts, and so lost in them, that I did not hear the unclosing of the door, or even a foot-step, until a whiff of sweetness stole across my senses, and I looked up to find that Ninga stood beside me.

Now I knew that she was not one of those women who come ambling through, on one of those small officious errands that invariably cross a man's serious business, and I waited for her to speak, though indeed she seemed in no haste to do so.

'Are you very busy this morning?' she said at last.

'No. Will you sit down, Ninga?'

This she did, and showed me a pale face, and two brilliant eyes that had but recently been washed in tears.

'Mr Saul,' she said, 'Arthur has asked me to marry him.'

'Yes.'

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I did not look at her, but it seemed a long while before her next words came.

‘Do you wish it?’

‘Do you?’

Turning sharply, I faced her in time to see the suspicion of dimples at the corners of her little, red, sad mouth.

‘I asked you first,’ she said, with dignity. ‘Do you?’

‘My wishes won’t matter much,’ I said, ‘if you and Arthur have made up your minds.’

‘There would have been no need for us to make up our minds,’ she said, heavily, ‘if you had not sent me away. He and I would have been good friends—brother and sister—for years.

‘Would you?’ I said, thinking of Arthur’s passionate looks that morning. ‘I don’t believe it.’

‘I am so young,’ she cried, with misery in her voice; and I was so happy—so happy! And now I am called upon to decide my life all in a moment, and there is no one to help me—not even you!’

My heart smote me. I took her slender hands in mine and stroked them, but I had not a word to say. I felt myself old, grey, and hard—a

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lifetime away from this young thing with the eyes and lips of a child, only an insane, wretched desire was upon me to be Arthur's age, to have Arthur's future and life before me.

'I am so old, child!' I said bitterly. 'How can I understand you—enter into your thoughts? Neither can you enter into mine!'

'I can—I do!' she said, with a low sob, that sounded more of pure joy than pain, as she laid one of my hands against her cheek, and held it there.

Ah, me! those quivering lips, those searching eyes! If I had spoken then! If I had forgotten age, unsuitability, all the stumbling-blocks that I had vigorously piled between us, then this story had never been written, and the tragedy that involved four lives had never been consummated! Nay, had I been more selfish, more eager to grasp my own delight at the cost of Arthur's, I should have acted the better part both for him and for her, both for another and for me.

Did some angel warn me, as I drew my hand away from that clinging, tender touch, not to put from me that truest, noblest gift of God—a woman's faithful love and trust? Why did I

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not set her on my knee, wind my arms about her, and never, never let her go?

The moment had passed. With the next came Arthur, pale, and with flashing eyes, but not so pale as the drooping figure sitting in the chair, and at sight of which he stopped short.

‘I thought you were alone, sir,’ he said; ‘but, since she is here, won’t you plead for me with her? You know,’ he went on, looking not at me, but at the bright head that bowed itself lower and lower on her breast, ‘that I did not wish to hurry her—that, were it not for her going away, and hating it so, I should have waited some time before I spoke to her.’

But Ninga made no sign, and, with a perceptible fall in his voice, he went on, after a little pause, ‘I am afraid I frightened her, sir, for she sent me away, but she must have come straight to you—and you will plead for me, for you know how I love her, and you love me, too!’

But still she did not stir, and I thought how blind love is, that he cannot see how different is this insensibility, to the tremors, the shrinkings of a young maid who loves, yet who is loth to confess it, and yield.

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'Give her time,' I said, my voice sounding strangely; 'let her go back to her father for awhile, and learn her own heart.'

'No,' she said, and lifted her head proudly, 'I will not go back; and I will marry Arthur!'

He snatched her in his arms, and kissed her hair, her forehead, in a kind of delirious ecstasy; but when he would have touched her mouth, she tore herself away. . . . God help her! That a woman should look so, who had just vowed to marry the man who loved her!

'I have only one condition to make,' she said, and in her voice was the subtle change that tells more than even the countenance can of what is going on within: 'it is this—that from the day I marry you, Mr Jasper becomes an ordinary acquaintance—that you do not frequent his society, or under any circumstances whatever invite him to your home.'

For a moment Arthur hesitated, and all the thronging memories of the friendship of long years rushed with fullest force upon him; but he looked at Ninga, and the struggle was over.

'I will give him up,' he said.

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But he looked ashamed, as a man may who in prosperity abandons an old and tried friend.

‘You will wish us good luck?’ said Ninga, turning to me, a vivid colour flaming into her white cheeks.

‘I do,’ I said; ‘and may God bless you!’

‘Will He?’ she said, turning pale. ‘I hope so. Come, Arthur’—she took him by the hand;—‘we must go and tell Mrs Shakel—and Silence,’ she added, with a burst of unmirthful laughter, as they went out, walking as lovers walk, together.

CHAPTER VII

‘The table is prepared in shining heaven,
The flowers of immortality are blown.’

AT dinner that night happiness apparently sat once more at our board, for Arthur was in wild spirits, and Ninga was dressed so beautifully that the expression of her face detracted but little from the grace and brilliancy of her general appearance.

Mr Jasper, too, who had come in late, wore an air of secret exultation, singularly unfortunate, I thought, on an occasion when he was to learn the destruction of all his hopes. He must be blind, too, not to see the proprietorship of Arthur's glances at Ninga, and in every word the young man addressed to her ; but he did not, and I saw Jasper's lip curl once or twice, as if in contempt for his friend, whom he had always dominated, and ruled at his will, until this young, slim girl had usurped his place, and broken, for once and always the thralldom in which Arthur had been held.

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Now, clearly it was my duty, as Arthur's guardian and hers, to announce their engagement to Mr Jasper, and with him, drink to their future happiness and prosperity; so when the servants had left the room, I looked at Ninga, and opened my lips to speak, but she was looking at me eagerly, imploringly, her hand half lifted, as if she would put back what was coming. For a moment the wild thought crossed me that she looked like some innocent criminal who has been falsely found guilty, and who knows her doom, yet shrinks from having sentence of death passed upon her; but as it chanced, Jasper spoke before I did.

'I don't know how to thank you, sir, he said for all your kindness and hospitality, but I shall not encroach on it much longer. I have to-day taken my passage'—he paused, and though addressing me, looked at Ninga—'for India in the *Hydaspes*.'

The *Hydaspes*!—Ninga's ship, in which, but for Arthur's impetuosity, she would have sailed within the week. • •

Ninga looked at him full, with something in her delicate face that overbore the half insolent triumph in his, then, as he added, 'I shall be able to take care of you, Miss Ninga—'

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‘I am not going,’ she said.

Strange how bitter a woman can look, and be, to a man whose unwelcome love is thrust upon her; and the scorn in her voice startled me, he had roused her to hate, if not love, so thoroughly.

‘She is going to stay here, and marry me,’ said Arthur, throwing back his head, and seeming to expand, as he looked at his friend with an exultation it would not have been in man’s nature not to feel, while Jasper was like a man turned to stone.

For some seconds he sat thus; then,—

‘I congratulate you both,’ he said, but if ever eyes held a curse in them, his eyes spoke one then, as he looked from one to the other of the handsome young pair.

‘I need not ask if you are happy,’ he said to Ninga, and at the cruel gibe in his voice she grew paler yet; ‘for your looks sufficiently betray your joy.’

‘You express your good wishes somewhat strangely, sir,’ I said coldly. ‘Your friendship for my nephew seems hardly to stand the test of time, and other natural changes.’

He looked at me indolently, as if debating in himself if I were worth a retort; then his gaze

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reverted to Ninga with an openness, a hardihood of appropriation that set the blood boiling in my veins, and made Arthur clench the hand that was lying on the table.

‘You may change your mind,’ he said to her, ‘even now. You are capricious; beautiful women are always capricious.’

He got up as he spoke, making no apology and sauntered slowly out, his hands in his pockets.

‘Arthur,’ I said, ‘if that fellow doesn’t go tomorrow, I’ll kick him out.’

‘He insulted you, Ninga,’ cried Arthur, passionately, as he went round to her. ‘I have a great mind to break every bone in his skin!’

‘Don’t!’ said Ninga, closing her eyes, and letting her head rest a moment against his broad shoulder. ‘I don’t think he can harm you much now. And he has been your friend, remember, for many years.’

‘Because he never let me see him in his true likeness,’ said Arthur, sadly. ‘Now that the mask is lifted, I find my affection for him gone.’

But I thought to myself, cynically enough, that if Ninga had not come between them, the two men might have been firm friends to their dying day; for I remembered my own friend, and through

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what glamour I had seen him, and could not blame Arthur for having, up to a certain point, found Jasper perfection.

‘Are you not coming up-stairs to-night?’ she said to me, as we all left the dining-room together.’

‘No; I have work that will keep me below;’ and cruel work it was, taking stock of my own heart.

They lingered awhile with me; then went away up the stairs together.

So, for the last time, I saw him as the living, breathing Arthur that I knew and loved; so, for the last time, with the stamp of happiness on his brow, and the boundless hopes of the future making his footsteps light as air, I saw him walk beside Ninga, his promised wife—the woman I loved, and though I knew it not then, the woman who loved me.

BOOK III



ARTHUR

CHAPTER I

‘I was benumbed, and staggered up and down
Through darkness without light—dark, dark, dark !
My flesh crept chill, my limbs felt manacled,
As had a snake coiled round them.’

NINGA sat at the deserted breakfast-table, leaning her head on her hand, but at sight of me, she started up with an exclamation of terror, and fell back before me.

‘What have you done to your hair ?’ she said, ‘have you powdered it—*for a joke ?*’

I had not looked in a glass during that awful night and morning, I dared not even look at a human countenance, but I had my work to do, and must find strength to do it.

‘Give me some coffee,’ I said briskly, ‘leave my hair alone. Have you never heard before of elderly gentlemen becoming grey in a single night ?’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘but only through some intense

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agony or shock. Has anything'—she paused to steady her shaking voice—'happened to Arthur?'

'What should happen?' I said, forcing down some coffee, but still not daring to look at her.

'There is something wrong,' she said; 'where is Arthur—where is Mr Jasper? There was a quarrel between them last night, and I was the cause of it.'

'What happened?' I said, still looking away from her.

'I wanted a book from downstairs, and Arthur went to fetch it, the time was about half-past ten. I had my back to the door, and when it opened, I thought Arthur had come back, and did not turn my head; but the next moment I was seized, and forcibly, brutally kissed. If I could have killed Jasper then, I would have done it; but while I was struggling with him, Arthur came in. *He*, that devil, let me go, and I ran to Arthur, but he put me back gently, and, pointing to the door, he followed Mr Jasper out.

“I will come back,” he said, but hour after hour, I waited, not daring to follow them to the laboratory. I stole down to the study, but you were not there, and, at last, I went to bed, but not to sleep.

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‘Tell me,’ she went on, laying her little hand on mine, ‘did you hear anything between two and three o’clock this morning?’

‘No. Did you?’

‘I heard muffled sounds,’ she said, her voice sinking to a whisper, ‘like footsteps that dragged, as if men were carrying a heavy weight. I got up then, and dressed, and even went to Arthur’s door; but all was silent within, and I knew that if there had been any accident, there would be a stir and bustle going on.’

‘What accident did you fear?’ I said, still carrying on a feint of breakfasting.

‘Do you not know my fears of Mr Jasper already?’ she said reproachfully; ‘and as Arthur was furious, he might easily have goaded the other into some violent act. But he did not,’ she added, with a sigh of intense relief. ‘Arthur is safe—your face tells me that.’

‘Yes, Arthur is safe,’ I repeated mechanically. ‘He is comfortably in bed at the present moment. and he asked me to tell you, Ninga, that perhaps he might not be able to see you for a day or two.’

‘Then something did happen?’ she cried out in pain. ‘Is he hurt—wounded?’

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‘Not wounded,’ I said; ‘but you must trust me, and ask no questions.’

I rose from the table—the strain upon me was too unbearable; but she stopped me.

‘And Mr Jasper?’ she said, her voice full of fear and doubt.

‘He has gone,’ I said.

‘Gone! In the night, like a thief?’

‘No; I saw him before he went. He will not return.’

The words dropped slowly, like pebbles, from between my lips.

‘Thank God!’ she cried joyously, and threw up her arms as if some heavy burden had fallen from them.

‘Do not thank God for it,’ I said, stifling the groan that rose to my lips; ‘rather pray that He will give us back yesterday!’

Then, fearful of further self-betrayal, I left her, and went up to Arthur.

Silence was there, with a look of happiness on his face that had been a stranger to it since Ninga came. I have seen just such a look on the face of a mother when watching her sleeping child.

Arthur lay with one arm above his head, his

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face white as marble, and with neither bruise nor stain to mar its fairness.

‘She will love him in time—she must,’ I thought, gazing down upon him.

On the staircase, later, I met Mrs Shakel, who looked anxious, and followed me into the library, with fifty questions all struggling for speech at once.

‘Well,’ I said coolly, ‘what is it?’

‘Oh, sir,’ she cried, holding up both hands, ‘your beautiful hair! It’s nearly as white as mine!’

‘So much the better,’ I said, somewhat roughly. ‘But what do you want?’

She wanted to know so much that she had to pause before she said, ‘Has Mr Arthur met with an accident, sir?’

‘Nothing to signify. He was in the laboratory last night trying an experiment, and a knife slipped, that was all.’

She heaved a deep sigh of relief.

‘And is Mr Jasper gone, sir?’

‘Yes; you will not see him here again.’

‘Thank God for that!’ she said heartily. ‘I used to think there’d be murder done between the two gentlemen on account of Miss Ninga. And

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where shall I send his things, sir?' she added briskly.

'Pack them up, and leave them till he—he sends for them.'

'Dear me, sir,' said the old woman, 'how you do shiver!' and she stirred the fire into a ruddy blaze.

I turned to see the cheerful light shining upon her apple-cheeks, and pretty, snowy curls, and yet there was something wistful in her face, as if she knew she ought to wish Ninga and Arthur happiness, yet was not able to do so.

I signed to her to go; then, sinking into a chair, covered my face with my hands, for indeed was I 'alone on a wide, wide sea.' God could not help me there, nor man either.

CHAPTER II

‘He sate upright, and ere the dream
Had had time to depart,
“Oh, God forgive me!” he exclaimed,
“I have torn out her heart.”’

THE beautiful old Eastern proverb that thus describes death: ‘A man goeth to and fro to his work in the fields; we look for him, and he is gone!’ seemed applicable enough to the case of Mr Jasper, who had disappeared from our midst, and after whom no inquiry (for he had no relations in England) was ever made.

His clothes were packed, and placed ready for the messenger who never appeared, his jewel-box I had removed to my bank, and neither Mrs Shakel nor the servants seemed to discern anything odd in his sudden evanishment, just as nothing but joy was felt at his departure.

But Arthur’s first inquiry after him was made in sufficiently startling fashion.

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‘Have you heard anything of Arthur, sir?’ he said.

Then, as I did not answer, he signed to Silence, who turned swiftly, and looked at me.

‘You mean Mr Jasper?’ I said.

Arthur looked confused, and pressed one hand against his brow. His left arm lay bandaged on the coverlid beside him.

‘I meant Jasper, of course!’ he said slowly. ‘But I feel bewildered—not myself—and I don’t understand why the loss of a few ounces of blood should affect me so queerly.’

‘You lost more than a few ounces,’ I said, with my fingers on his pulse, which beat strong and steady; ‘but you are well enough now to talk, so you may tell me what really happened the other night.’

‘I can’t remember,’ he said, still with that painful look of indecision, as if two memories struggled with, and contradicted each other within him. ‘I was mad with anger at Arthur’s—I mean Jasper’s—brutal outrage on Ninga. I followed him to the laboratory, then struck him across the mouth with my whole strength. He did not strike me back; he smiled at me with lips dripping with blood, and said that

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Ninga loved him, and that out of mere caprice, and because they had had a lovers' quarrel, she had chosen to accept *me*. He declared that he had often met her alone by appointment, both in the house, and out of it, but I cut him short by saying that if he didn't instantly clear out, I would make him.

"What!" he said. "You will make an open scandal — drive me out in the middle of the night?"

'I held the back door open for answer.

"Let me have my hat and coat then," he said sullenly; and I fetched, and threw them at him.

'He picked them up, put them on, then turned to give me the most infernal look that I should think one mortal man ever gave another.

"I shall come back," he said, "and I shall stay!"

So far, Arthur had spoken coherently, as if he obeyed the imperative command of a dominant voice; but now, as he tried to proceed in his tale, he wandered, lost grip of his subject, and mixed up his own identity and Jasper's in a way less bewildering to his hearers than himself.

Silence had stood motionless as an ebon statue since Arthur began to speak, and though, of

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course, he could not hear him, of the flitting expressions that crossed his features, one finally remained, and that was horror.

This much at last I gathered from Arthur's disjointed narrative. He shut the door after Jasper, but did not lock it. On a table near, was a decanter of whisky, with soda-water and glasses. He poured some out; then, thinking of Ninga, and her certain anxiety, left the room to seek her. But by mistake a servant had put out the gas on the drawing-room landing, and thinking she had gone to bed, he returned to the laboratory, and thought that, as he entered it, he saw the side door softly close. He had left it shut, but now locked it, and drew down the blind, then he drank some of his whisky and water, and after that he remembered nothing.

'I have a vague recollection of coming out of a state of coma; I seemed to see you and Silence bending over me; to suffer intense agony—such as I should imagine a drowning man does when he is being dragged back to life; then everything faded; but, when I came to myself, I was in bed, my left arm bandaged and useless beside me. Now, sir, who placed me in this bed, and how did I receive that injury?'

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‘Silence and I brought you here.’

‘But how came you to be in the laboratory?’

‘We meant to prosecute an experiment last night—’

‘And did you experiment on me?’ said Arthur, with a faint smile.

‘No.’

‘Then Jasper did!’

I remained silent for awhile; then I said, ‘He doctored your grog in your absence. When you were unconscious, he came back through the window.’

‘And then,’ said Arthur, ‘he made a deliberate attempt on my life. He opened the main artery of my arm, and left me to bleed to death. An assassin!’

He spoke dully, as one who tries to force an indignation that he does not feel.

‘But he failed in his object,’ I said, dryly—
‘doubly so, since he intended your death to appear one of suicide. And to such it would no doubt have been attributed, had not Silence appeared when he did.’

Arthur stretched out his hand to the deaf-mute, and wrung the big black hand in silence. He did it less as a sign of gratitude than as

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one who royally acknowledges a thing as his right; and again it struck me how curiously half hearted he seemed, and as if at the mercy of two wills that pulled him in opposite directions.

‘And now,’ I said, ‘ask me no more questions, for I will not answer them, nor will Silence, who has sworn to me never to discuss with you the events of last night.’

‘This is treating me like a child!’ cried Arthur, passionately. ‘What! am I to know nothing of what you have done, what you intend to do, about Jasper?’

‘I can tell you so much,’ I said, ‘that he has escaped justice, and that he will never trouble you again. Put him out of your thoughts at once and for ever—the past was his; the future is yours and Ninga’s. And now all you have to do is to get well, and make her happy first, and yourself after.’

‘She knows nothing?’ he exclaimed eagerly.

‘Nothing; and she never must know anything. She knows that there was a quarrel, and that he left abruptly last night—that is all.’

Arthur sighed, and closed his eyes; falling asleep instantly.

I called Mrs Shakel, and left him in her charge,

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and Silence and I came away, for we had work to do that day—work such as devils even might quail at.

And while, with locked doors, we were busy upon it, I thought it possible that a gentle shape would steal to Arthur's side, and covertly gaze upon him, for I knew that his suffering, and her knowledge that it had been brought about through love of her, had doubly strengthened the real affection Ninga had always felt for the boy.

CHAPTER III

‘Since then, at an uncertain hour
That agony returns ;
And, till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.’

EVENTS marched swiftly, for Arthur rapidly mended, and constantly urged upon Ninga a speedy marriage, and now I could not but feel that a great responsibility rested with me in letting Ninga marry him thus, with so much haste, and without having even obtained her father’s consent, but my nature had sunk under the shock I had sustained, and deprived me, for the time at least, of all power of controlling others.

And she was equally willing with him, with a miserable willingness that sometimes shocked and troubled me, just as much as his eagerness, his insistence, and, in a word, his selfishness angered me. This was not Arthur’s nature ; it was something that wanted, and must get

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her, that would hurry her, even to her own hurt, with a violence that forgot chivalry, decency even, seeking for nothing in love, but, to use an energetic expression of Amyot's Plutarch, 'to get drunk.'

And so, one February morning, a pale bride, with no tears nor smiles, stood by a pale bridegroom at the altar, and methought the name of that man was Death; and then they departed together, with Silence for Arthur's body-servant—for there was no hatred between Ninga and the deaf-mute now, for his devotion had been tried as with fire.

Strange, how most of the raging unrest died out of me with the innocent kiss she lifted up her face to give me when she went away, and how, from that moment, I was able to love her reverently and tenderly—not as Ninga, but as Arthur's wife.

Adieu! I had already said to her (to God I commend you!) but to my heart I whispered 'Sayonara,' the literal translation from the Japanese, being 'It must be so.'

I mounted the stairs, and passed through the beautiful rooms that seemed to me but the chiller and the lonelier for the burst of

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sunshine that had flooded them for awhile, only to depart; and I asked myself in anguish why we had both disregarded the warning sent to us on that night when I waited for the ship to come in, in the midst of the phantom-like fog and darkness?

Against my will, my feet dragged me to the laboratory, that already had a strange, disused look, for dust had gathered on the tables and benches, the light filtered dimly through the cobwebbed panes in the distance; the half-opened cupboard door swung idly; and upon the great iron-bound chest, in which Silence sometimes placed at night the subjects he had been working upon during the day, lay one of Arthur's gloves, thrown down by him on his last visit to the place. I was alone with a cloud of witnesses about me, and yonder lay the great, dark, wide stain that his life-blood had made; but as I stood, gazing fixedly down upon it, I saw another stream mingling with, and over-powering Arthur's, and the ghastly scenes of that accursed night were re-acted once more before my eyes.

At that moment the door at the far end of the room opened, and I saw Falstaff's face

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grinning in the aperture. He came forward slowly, pulled one lock of his shock head rubbed his knees hard, then pointed to the chest, and grinned again. *

He looked upon Silence as master there, and on me as servant; but when "I had relieved my feelings by promptly kicking him out, I saw him surveying me respectfully through the grimy window, and evidently re-adjusting his ideas to the present state of things.

And then I sat down to think, dragging myself through such a purgatory as would not be known if men were not cursed with memory, for surely I, and I alone, was to blame for the horrible thing that had come upon us, for it was I, and not Silence, who made the discovery with which I commenced this story, and that had since been turned to such unnatural use. Had I meddled not with those secrets of life and death that are safe only in God's hands, then woe there might have been in this house, and bitter suffering, but an unpardonable crime had not been committed, and my existence had not been haunted by an undying regret. *

Yet, when I resolved *not* to profit by my

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new-found knowledge, not to spread it, lest it should become an instrument of the devil, and when I bade Silence forget it, too, nor dare to practise it under my roof, I had taken such steps surely as most men would deem sufficient, but one lawless moment, one lightning impulse of evil had undone all, and already the cold conviction was creeping through me, that an awful crime had been committed in vain, and that, from every point of view, my boasted success had proved a failure and black mistake.

And she, who had been our very light, and the sweet spirit of the house, had, by that very sweetness, become the predisposing cause of a crime, yet through Jasper's instrumentality, not her own. 'But, O God!' I cried, 'punish me as Thou wilt, but let not the punishment fall on her!' I know not to this day how that ghastly period of waiting passed, in which I daily looked for letters, and when they came, wrung my heart, not by what they said, but what they did not say. I will pass on to one chilly spring afternoon, when I was sitting in the laboratory, doing nothing, when a light footstep sounded behind me, and the next moment a cold hand, that seemed to strike

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chill even through my clothes, fell heavily on my shoulder.

‘You see, I’ve come back, sir,’ said a voice in my ear, that curdled the very life-blood at my heart, and froze me into a shape of horror in which only the ears that heard him, and the eyes that involuntarily sought the chest, had life. . . . he had said that he would come back and *stay*. . . .

Many a man had died under the shock, and it had been better for me so; but my cup of agony was only half filled yet, and while I struggled to speak, to move, the thing, man, apparition, or devil, moved round, and stood before me.

‘Are you ill, sir?’ it said.

And then I forced myself to look up, and it was Arthur who stood before me—Arthur pale and haggard, who had borrowed Jasper’s voice—nay, the very trick and inflection of his tones; and beyond him stood Silence, his eyes fixed imploringly on me—if he could find strength, why should not I? The bond between us was one of blood, that neither might repudiate, even if he wished.

‘Welcome home, Arthur,’ I said, but the

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touch of his hand set me shuddering as I followed him to find Ninga.

I dared not lift my eyes to her face and see my handiwork there, for *it was mine*; but for me she would have looked her last for ever upon Arthur on the night that he followed Jasper downstairs, only when she spoke, I knew that Ninga—the Ninga whom I had known—was dead, and that merely a tortured human animal remained . . . and then Mrs Shakel came and they went away together, and I was left alone to think of the thing that I had done.

BOOK IV



ARTHUR AND JASPER

CHAPTER I

‘What if his spirit
Re-entered its cold corse, and came upon thee
With many a stab from many a murderer’s poniard?’

THE bride and bridegroom had been home a week, and they had praised Mrs Shakel’s work without stint, but smiles were infrequent on her face now, and none of those gay shouts of laughter that I had formerly heard, when Ninga was in her company, brightened the old so lately happy house.

There was a shadow on our threshold, there was a chill in the air; a nameless dread and fear sat with us at the board, and lay down with us when we slept; fearfully we gazed in each other’s faces as if looking for the new thing the hour would bring forth, and we could not tell aloud what was the source of all our disquietude and woe.

We had grown accustomed to hear Jasper’s voice issuing from Arthur’s lips, to see Jasper’s

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peculiarities of gesture and movement faithfully reproduced in him—nay, to hear the absent man's very tricks of expression, and turns of thought, so that had I been a blind man, I could have sworn it was Jasper's self who sat among us.

And now my admiration for Ninga rose high, and I saw how a woman's courage may soar above a man's, and shame him, for as she had vowed to cleave to him in sickness as in health, for better for worse, so now she nobly redeemed her promise, and strove only to nurse him back to mental and physical health. And had she not been so docile, and truly religious, had she been one of the rebellious, passionate women, fiercely intolerant of discipline, of pain, that we see everywhere around us to-day, then I think she would have taken her own life, or gone raving mad, but her pluck, her principles would not suffer her to do either. She was like that indestructible material, that you may burn again and again in the furnace, it but comes out the more dazzling white, and each time unconsumed, even so her pure spirit was bruised, but never broken.

Often as we spoke together of Arthur, we both

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shunned allusion to the unnatural change that had come over him; and I knew that she was trying to persuade herself it existed only in her imagination, and that just as one constantly sees in strangers a resemblance to some beloved face always in one's thoughts, so her intense loathing of Mr Jasper stamped even his friend with something of his image and character.

But high as her spirit was, bravely as she struggled against the evidence of her own senses, I saw how frequently she stumbled, and almost fell, with what faintings of heart, and sickness of spirit she forced her pale lips to smile and speak, so that no outsider could guess he was other than her bridegroom—the chosen lover of her youth.

And that he loved her, no one could doubt though at times he displayed a freakish humour that puzzled and fretted her, and for which he was afterwards always sorry, covering her with kisses from which she did not shrink, though she never returned them.

I think she never for one moment forgot how it was on her account that he had fallen from his young prime of splendid manhood, to this broken thing of ill-health and listless energies,

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of indifference to those healthy aims and ambitions that had formerly animated him, so that his life now was but that of an animal, who is content to live by the senses alone.

He rose late, read or dawdled through the early part of the day, walked, or went to some place of amusement in the afternoon, and at dinner ate and drank heavily, only to fall asleep during the greater part of the evening. I could not blame him—did I not know what poison was working in his veins?—had not my curse and the punishment of my sin, increased an hundredfold since I saw its result in Arthur?

Sometimes, as I gazed on him—this Frankenstein that I had helped to create—half Jasper half Arthur—an awful impulse seized me to tell him the truth, to call upon him, trumpet-voiced, to be himself, to wrestle with and cast out the deadly influence that was upon him, and win his way through agony, and even death itself, to his former state.

But such speech involved stupendous issues, to which I dared not commit myself, and I chose a middle course, seeking by every means in my power to rouse him to awaken in him some of the old ardour for his profession that

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had formerly inspired him, but in vain I preached to him the noble psalm of life, his ears were shut to its grandeur, no impulse to work, to achieve, was in him, nor when I sharply reminded him that he was dependent on my bounty, did he fire up as the old Arthur would have done; but in Jasper's voice, and with Jasper's peculiar smile, said that he was quite satisfied to be so for I had plenty of money for both.

And soon it seemed as though the demon with which he struggled had at last ended by overcoming him, and he fought no more, but to me, it was as if a man whom I had done to his death, followed me with his eyes, pursued me with his voice, was at my side day and night, in his murdered presentment, as in his living travesty of the murdered man, and sleep forsook me, though, to wake in those days was less torture than to sleep.

Silence would often seek to tempt Arthur to the laboratory, and sometimes he would go, and listlessly take part in some experiment, then as listlessly saunter out again, at the mercy of any momentary whim that arose, and every day he leaned more and more upon Ninga, both

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physically and mentally; and once, when I met them abroad, she looking like a star—serene, fair and beautiful—he with bowed frame, clinging to her arm, I thought how strangely the position of man and woman was reversed between them.

But, seeing her so brave and strong, I was not prepared for the woman who, half beside herself with horror, rushed to me one day, shuddering in every limb, and, crying out, ‘It is Jasper that I have married, not Arthur!’ fell in convulsions at my feet.

CHAPTER II

‘ We all
Came round and asked her why.
Giddy she seemed, and sure there was
A trouble in her eye.’

AND now surely this was a piteous sight to see—a young thing, scarcely more than a child, gifted by Heaven with a natural gaiety and joyousness of heart that made her the delight of all around, crushed to earth by a fate as undeserved as it was unnatural, as impossible to combat, as it was almost beyond human endurance to suffer.

For there are opponents against which we fight as with air ; there are things against Nature that we may wrestle with, yet touch not ; we can feel Apollyon’s presence, and put out our whole strength normally against him ; but against the supernatural influence, the poisonous slander, the creeping coldness of mistrust, the good blade in our right hand strikes in vain.

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And I knew, as I lifted Ninga up, that there was no cure for her, that no love of mine or any other could help her now; and bitterly I cursed the hour in which I gave her to Arthur, mingling the thread of that miserable, thwarted life with her own.

Gradually the convulsions ceased, and she lay where I had laid her, with her hands folded on her breast, and all the horror gone out of her face, and only a look of pale rest, like a child who, after long fear and wandering, has happed upon his mother. Angels might have wept to see her, knowing to what she must awaken, how, then, could I, a simple mortal who loved her beyond belief, stay the tears that coursed unbidden down my cheeks?

So strange, so rare were they as to bring to me an exquisite relief, and, for a few moments, there lingered in my breast a peace that, after the tortures of the past few weeks, seemed to me like Heaven. And, watching her, I prayed as I had never prayed before that, no matter what others suffered, some way might be made for her out of the difficulty, some miracle upon her behalf be performed, so that she might never know the dreadful truth.

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I dreaded to see her eyes open, to hear confirmation of the fearful words that had rushed out when self-control had failed her; and I passed swiftly into an inner room as she uttered a heart-breaking sigh, then cried aloud.

‘And if it be so, then where is Arthur, the gentle, the true-hearted, for he is not *here*! It is as though from the gates of hell that wicked soul had returned to wrestle with and cast out my boy’s pure one.’ And again in her voice spoke a delirium of loathing, ‘Oh, my God! It must be Jasper—for Arthur could never have known of, or practised such things as Jasper did—kill me, O God! lest I go mad in enduring them!’

And hearing her, I trembled, and something suddenly broke loose in me, and leaped up, commanding that I should go instantly and slay this monster that my discovery had created, slay it and break it in pieces, ere worse things had come, and Ninga’s innocent life followed the soul that had been murdered, pay the forfeit for my sin. All the man’s fierce instinct to protect, to shield the helpless, the ineffably dear to him, made but a headlong brute of me, and had Arthur entered at that moment, the deed

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must, and would have been done, and the hands that had spilled the guilty, have spilled the innocent blood.

And what then? Rid of her accursed tormentor she would have been, but what of her grief for me when I hanged? Who should gather up the fragments of her broken life, or comfort her when I was gone? I went into the room where she was, and surely she found nothing in my face to scare her, yet, covering her face with both hands, she seemed to whisper to herself, 'What have I done—oh! what have I done?'

'You have come to me, Ninga,' I said gently, 'as I bade you to come in any trouble.'

'But not to complain of Arthur,' she said.

Now, think of it—the dignity of this young thing, who had learned for herself the lesson that a wife should never discuss her husband and his failings with anybody, and who, but for the impulse of over-mastering terror that had overcome her, would never have come to me for comfort or help at all!

'Ninga,' I said, taking her hands firmly as she half rose to leave me, 'the time is past for keeping silence about the change that has come to

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pass in Arthur. At present it is known only to us, but soon it will be patent to the whole world.'

She seemed not to breathe as she sat gazing at me, and across the clear depths of her blue eyes, there flitted emotions that bared her soul before me, but among them all, hope had no place.

'It is unnatural—it is unheard of!' she said at last, very low. 'Is Jasper dead, and does he live again in Arthur's body?'

I made her no answer, nor did she seem to expect one. Her gaze seemed not at me, but through me, at some object beyond.

'I always told you,' she went on, as one who thinks aloud, 'how completely Jasper had mastered him, body and soul, and how I did not believe Arthur would ever free himself from that influence; and though for a time I dethroned him, yet I am sure that he reasserted his empire afterwards, and that in some demoniacal way he has actually taken possession of Arthur's body. Have they changed souls? Does my poor boy's spirit dwell in that worse than murderer's frame, and is Jasper dwelling in peace and content, winning the love and respect of all with whom he is brought in contact? And yet,' she added, in a tone of exquisite pathos,

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there are moments when Arthur is himself—his old self alone ; but, clinging to him, and to them, as I will, using my every effort to prolong them, they pass, and he is once more the possessed thing that, by some infernal spell, Jasper has made him. Yes, that is his punishment—the punishment devised chiefly for me—that, in escaping Jasper, I should yet be doomed to hear his voice, to share his life ! Only this morning he cried out, “ I am not Arthur at all, I am Jasper ! I have got you, and you are mine ! That poor wretch Arthur is dead, but I, Jasper, *live*—” ’

Ninga stopped short.

‘ What was I saying ? ’ she muttered. ‘ It is easy to keep silence, but to speak is like the in-rushing of waters, and wisdom ends. ’

And then, with one gasping, sobbing breath, she left me. But it was to me she had come, not Mrs Shakel—and for that proof of trust, of love, I was grateful.

CHAPTER III

‘The cloud then showed his golden head and his bright
form emerged,
Hovering and glittering on the air, before the face of Thel.’

IT was Ninga, who, in her ceaseless struggles after a true solution of the trouble, hit upon the idea that it was a case of demoniacal possession, and one day I found her with a pile of books before her, taken from my library. She had discarded all those that dealt with suggestion and will power; but as I came near, she put one finger on the page before her, and without first looking at me, for she always knew my step, as I hers, began to read aloud to me.

‘Under the influence of demoniacal possession, resulted nervous accidents of every kind, principally hysteria—epilepsy and phenomena similar to those that are attributed to imagination, added to a great exaltation of sensorial acuteness, so that they could hear what was passing at a great distance. In short, the sorcerers and exorcists of centuries ago could do nothing more

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wonderful than hypnotists can do to-day; but we do not call these latter sorcerers, nor do they openly ascribe their powers to the devil.'

A crackling laugh sounded behind us, a nervous tremor jerked Ninga's hand from the book, and I saw the moisture gather, and stand on her brow.

'A respectable and much maligned gentleman, said Arthur, rudely. 'We are each our own devil or angel, with a little assistance from other people of course—and you'll occasionally find our devil doing deeds that the noblest saint is incapable of.

'And I often hear you two talking when you think I'm miles away—only all that's tommy-rot.' He pointed contemptuously at the book. 'Nobody knows that better than you—eh old boy? *You* could teach these old buffers a thing or two—and so could I—for I've made a special study of that subject' (and this was untrue, Jasper had, but he never), 'not here'—he knitted his brows, and tried to collect some random thought—'somehow this damned bleak climate never seems my home.' " " "

He frowned, then turned on his heel, and went out, banging the door behind him.

There was scarce the pause of a moment, when her brave voice went on, omitting some words,

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but reading the essential part of what was before her.

‘The Djogs and Fakirs have, as everyone knows, since the year 2400 practised hypnotism with a devotional aim, which is to unite themselves with God in a kind of ecstasy. They also practise magnetism in a way that is altogether marvellous and incomprehensible, if calculated, too, to discourage our European wonder-workers, at whom these Djogs may well laugh in their sleeves. There are three schools of them in India—one situated on the border of the Ganges, another by the side of Orissa, the third in the south of the peninsula, and they hypnotically commune with each other in the most regular fashion. Putting to sleep at a distance, remaining hypnotized for whole days and weeks, immovable as stylites, *retaining, nevertheless, a superior will that substitutes one brain for another, exchanging at a distance of millions of miles the most exact impressions*—all this is merely a joke to the Djogs. And Jasper was an Indian, and a dealer in occult science,’ she said, lifting her white face to mine. ‘What if Jasper has died, coming back from the pits of hell to juggle, to substitute his wicked soul for our boy’s innocent one, overcoming his

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struggles to re-enter his own body, as in life Jasper completely mastered him?’

I shook my head, because ever my tongue stumbled and faltered when I sought to lie to Ninga; and, after all, why should she not hug to herself that tender faith, rather than know that I—I was the juggler who had played with Arthur’s soul?

‘If the medicine of the imagination is the most efficient, why should we not make use of it?’ Deslow exclaims; and anything that made her think gently of Arthur, inexpressibly comforted me, but now she sighed heavily, then turned once more to the cold comfort of the work before her.

‘The influence of celestial bodies upon human beings was already the base of the astrology invented by the Chaldeans, and this old mystical conception, after perpetuating itself through millions of generations, threw the startling light of a flambeau on the very threshold of the modern world before becoming for ever extinct. . . .

‘In the fifteenth century, Paracelsus, who revolutionised the medicine of his time, professed that the vital force was derived from the stars, which conducted him to the belief in the

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existence of a sympathetic fluid between the celestial worlds and living creatures. He pretended that man is dowered with a double magnetism, one portion attracting to itself the planets, being nourished by them, thence drawing wisdom, thought and the senses, and that the other half attracted to itself the elements, and disintegrated them; that the attraction and hidden virtue of man resembles that of amber, and the magnet (which latter has always exercised a deep impression on the human mind by its physical proportions, the existence of two poles, and a remoter action without direct contact), *that by this virtue the magnetic virtue of healthy persons attracts the enfeebled magnetism of the sick.*"—Yes, and absorbs it, too,' added Ninga.

'My child,' I said, trying to speak lightly, 'there's something in that; for we all have a dual nature, and we all like strong, cheerful people better than puling ones, or why are we all so fond of you?'

But my heart smote me, as she shook her head, and glanced in a mirror near that had, not so long ago, given back her joyous youth and beauty, and now that fragile, sad-eyed woman was my little Ninga, and something

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climbed up in my throat, and half choked me as I stood.

And I—I alone—had done it all, because—oh, blind! blind! blind!—I would not, or could not see . . . but for me, both the young men would have gone away, their damaged hearts be mended by now, and Ninga would be what even God Himself could not make her over again on earth, after the hell through which she had passed.

She turned a page, and read from it,—

‘Pomponace admitted that certain men are gifted with powerful properties that they can exercise, not only on their own bodies, but upon those of their fellow creatures;’ and ‘Agrippa de Nettesheim believed that all the bodies of the universe are allied by sympathies or natural antipathies;’ while ‘Jerome Carden maintained that the sun is in harmony with the heart and the air, the moon with the humours and with water. The Jesuit Kercher admitted numerous kinds of magnetism that of the sun, the moon, the planets, of the elements, metals, plants and animals. And, indeed, may not this force, admitted among animals, practically denied among humans, account for that instinct by which dogs, horses and cats distinguish between friends and foes, recognise

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sympathy, perceive antipathy? Probably they see things in the human face which our eyes cannot behold.'

'And we are meant to be so blinded,' I said, 'or the battle of life would be even harder to fight than it is,' thus sought to distract her thoughts from the subject before her, that I would have given my life to see germane to Arthur's case.'

'Werdig goes further, and declares everything to be subject to the power of magnetism, averring that by it are explained all phenomena, even life and death. All nature, he says, is peopled with spirits, and magnetism results from these shocks of sympathy or antipathy. Oh! that is true,' she cried out, 'or why did I always hate Mr Jasper and love you?' And here again 'the human body has a perfect electric organisation, and is indeed an animated electric machine.'

I sat down at a little distance from Ninga, having suddenly changed my mind and resolved that I would encourage her in these studies, that, from the beginning of time, have to all men, in all nations, proved extraordinarily interesting, for they would do more to take her out of herself than any of those other distractions I

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had so vainly put in her way. For hers was but a phase of the intense curiosity we all feel about the unknown, and which will never perish, as it is one of the thousand forms assumed by that belief in the marvellous which is eternal, so I said no further word, and did not try to draw her away.

‘Listen,’ she went on, taking up another book, this time on Suggestion, and truly once it had fascinated me, as it now did her, and will many other searchers after truth. ‘In one degree, even more advanced than hypnotisation, the conscience disappears, the psychic spontaneousness is suppressed, and the subject becomes, *in the fullest sense of the term, an automaton, submitted to the will, the caprice of the experimenter.*’

‘Our old friend will-power, under another name,’ I said. ‘You meet with it every day of your life—it is the people who draw a straight line across the chart, and walk it, who rule the world.’

She shook her head, following out her own idea, and looking up at me earnestly.

‘May not that be the explanation,’ she said, ‘that as a Fakir, a Djog, past master of such unholy arts, Jasper has brought Arthur entirely

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under his will, so that Arthur thinks his thoughts, speaks his voice,, snatches violently (she whitened to the colour of a shroud) at those things Jasper wanted for himself, punishes and tortures the spirit that still, resists him, because it recognises and loathes him through his disguise of Arthur's helpless body?'

But I turned my head away, for I could not meet her eyes, knowing, as I did, that the very vileness, yea, the life itself, that ran in our poor boy's veins, would cease only when his blood was cold in death.

Arthur came in, and, approaching the table, roughly put his arms round Ninga, and kissed her boisterously, in a kind of horse-play that was an insult to such a woman. 'Plotting again?' he said, with an evil, malevolent leer, that was a travesty of those covert glances of Jasper, that Ninga and I so well remembered. 'Got some books in front of you to pretend you're not flirting? Sly old codger!' And he gave me a dig in the ribs. 'But I'm not jealous. Ninga's my wife, you know—not yours—to do as I like with, and love and torment,' he added, with an evil look that Jasper had never shown, for he at least had taken pains to hide his wickedness, while

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his *doppel-gänger* never missed a chance of parading and exulting in the coarseness and licence that I had always felt (and Ninga too) were hidden behind his suave dark beauty.

Suddenly he burst out into that laugh, half Arthur, half Jasper, in which the two familiar voices strove with each other, producing hideous discord, then caught her hand, and with no light touch pulled her out of her chair. 'Come and put on your hat,' he said, 'I want a walk—a long walk in the crowded streets—for sooner or later we are bound to run up against Jasper—or shall we say, Arthur?'

And well I knew that Ninga looked eagerly for him, too, that she might pray him to remove the curse he had laid upon Arthur, or give him back the soul that he had substituted for Arthur's own; and I knew also that never on any earthly land or sea would they three come face to face again with one another.

CHAPTER IV

'And all shall say, "Without a use this shining woman lived,
Or did she only live to be at death the food of worms?"'

FROM that day forth a very fever of curiosity seized Ninga. When she supposed me engaged in the laboratory, constantly I found her sitting with all my books spread out before her, in which she searched for corroboration of her belief that, from a distance, Jasper was punishing her through Arthur, and through the possession of his soul, giving him criminal suggestions; but she was buoyed up by a hope I had not, that sooner or later the wicked influence would depart, and Arthur's good and gentle spirit return.

And I had to look on, even assist at that search, I, the juggler, who had played at pitch and toss with a human soul, who had played and lost, and it was Ninga, the innocent girl, who had to pay in full the stakes ~~and~~ upon whom the whole ghastly punishment fell.

And Arthur, who could not bear her out of his sight, to torture, or worse still, to love, would often interrupt her at these studies, imparting into them

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a flippancy that would have been ghastly did not life group itself continually into what appear to us unnatural combinations, and at last Ninga and I grew callous to this one, for we had both reached the limit of human suffering, or so, in our blind ignorance, we thought then.

There he would sit, and tell us snake stories, Indian stories, and native folk-lore that blanched Ninga's face as she listened, that in their creepy ghastliness, their devilish suggestions, unnerved even me, till the chance touch of his hand made me leap aside as if one of the monsters of which he spoke had been conjured into our midst.

And I asked myself, what, then, is the value of a soul, if all knowledge, all intelligence, all sense of beauty and love, even (the two are one) dwell in the blood, and not in the brain; for had not Arthur, with the blood of Jasper, acquired Jasper's mental endowments and memory? He displayed a most amazing grasp and comprehension of those ancient cosmogonies of which hypnotism ~~is only~~ a relic, and like a smitten physician, who is able to lecture exhaustively on the genesis of his fatal complaint, astounded us by the luminosity of his talk. But one day he startled us both horribly, for, suddenly bending

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down his face to Ninga's, till they were eye to eye,—
'Can you *see* him?' he said abruptly.

She did not flinch, only looked back at him with that courage I had never seen matched in man or woman yet, and said that she saw some one, indeed, herself.

'Jasper, you mean?' he said curtly, and then added,—'Don't you know that a somnambulist of Würtemberg could perceive in the right eye of a man the image of a second self, but more grave or more lively, while the seer of Prevorst claimed that he could *see* the human soul? "Souls," said she, "have no shadows. Their form is grey, their vestments are those that they wore in life, but grey, like themselves—" and if that's so, why don't I wear Jasper's vestments?' and he looked down as in surprise at his dark blue frock coat, for Jasper had never worn one, but dressed after a fashion peculiarly his own.

Ninga answered nothing, only put back a lock of bright hair that fell across his forehead, for when he was silent and looked ~~down~~, she could love him as Arthur, and much of the torture of the situation lay in her ever being caught in the flux and re-flux, of alternate love and hate.

'His clothes are upstairs still,' said Arthur. 'Per-

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haps he left them on purpose. If you'll give me the keys, sir, I'll wear a rig-out of Jasper's to-morrow.'

He was looking steadily at me, and I gave him back look for look ; but I wondered if the wall of deceit that we humans build between each other was still standing or broken down. . . . I wondered if *he knew what I knew*—if the quality of primitive truth, as opposed to the lies of civilisation would force us into speech, and so we might find a way out, and that not by death, by which Ninga might be set free. But he only laughed mockingly, and said,—

'After all, the old Würtemberg buffer was kinder than the new photography, for he did let the poor soul stick to its vestments—we have mostly lost our characters—we are now stripped of our flesh and our clothes—and uncommon ugly most of us look in our bones,' he added grimly. 'Don't it make you realise how little you, with your passions, and, soul and heart are—they are the transparencies round a bony framework, which feels and knows nothing—but *lasts* while all the ~~other~~ perishes? Now it's odd—but, though often I don't feel sure of my brains or my identity, whenever I am in the laboratory I've got an odd sort of feeling that I am hunting round for my bones—that if I stretched out my

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hand I could touch them—you know how, when you are looking for a thing, your finger tips insist on its being there, though you repeatedly overlook it—and you go back to it again and again, and there it *is*.’

Ninga did not reply, she was turning over the pages of the book before her, and Arthur looked over her shoulder at a picture of Royalty and the salt of the earth bobbing about in a mud pond at Bath, which spared neither King nor Queen to its limning.

‘The contagion of idiots,’ he said, in just the way that Jasper would have said it. ‘And yet, when the ridiculous paraphernalia of the *vaquet* disappeared, like tawdry veils screening a great truth, men discovered that everything that in history is regarded as supernatural, is produced by a bodily force more powerful in some than others, but as absolutely real and animal as is flesh and blood.’

I made a movement of dissent, and he turned on me fiercely.’

‘You mean, I suppose, that I am no better than one of the crowd who worshipped Mesmer—grossly credulous, enslaved to the demands of its imagination, naturally, avid of things marvellous—you!’ he added, with insulting emphasis. ‘Why, there’s no more bigoted, intolerant creature on earth than a scientific man—tadpoles I call ’em, only fit to

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be put in an aquarium. Science should be depicted as blind in both eyes, and only partially hearing with one ear, all his other senses suppressed, except that he always has the colic from a pain in his temper, and even when you've thrashed knowledge into him, he takes centuries to assimilate it.'

Ninga's eyes flashed as I had never seen them flash before, and she made a movement away from him, and towards me, at which he laughed jeeringly.

'You haven't found out much after all, old buck,' he said. 'You just potter round on the old lines, like the good old stick-in-the-mud you are. If you had done a quarter of what Edison has, with his unholy inventions—though it adds a new terror to life to think that your voice may hold you up to ridicule as a blatant fool centuries hence—and it's bad enough now to have preachers and singers switched on to your bedside, with the promise later on of *seeing* 'em in person when you mayn't want 'em! What are you staring at?' he added angrily, and surely some lightning manifestation of secret and awful power streamed from ~~my~~ my eyes then, for his sank before them, and, trembling, he hid his face from me. Did he understand *now*? And then everything slid away from me but Ninga's arms, as I fell forward in a dead swoon within them.

CHAPTER V

‘Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny,
The way that I am bid by you to go :
To follow I am ready. If I choose not,
I make myself a wretch—and still must follow.’

ALL this trouble had changed Mrs Shakel suddenly into a very, very old woman ; and though Ninga forced herself to cheerfulness in her company, and never confided in her as in me, the poor old woman’s heart was broken.

For she had loved Arthur, next to me, better than anyone in the world, and, after him, Ninga, and there was no point of comfort in her horizon, nor was there ever likely to be any now.

One day, as if compelled to it, she put a rembling hand on my coat, and said,—

Master—you wouldn’t see what we all saw—and when she tried, in her innocent way, to show you what was in her heart—ay, and in yours, for you just doated on her, and did not know it—why

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wouldn't you listen? For more than that she could not do and be a woman.'

'And I could not answer her. . . . I saw myself standing once more by the river . . . as Ninga discoursed sweetly of love "So foolish was I and ignorant, like, as it were, a beast before Thee!"'

Mrs Shakel's niece was married now, and had a baby, which she often brought; but the aunt scarcely looked at it, but Ninga did, and once I chanced to see her take the tiny creature in her arms, and before I dreamed of it, the tears were rushing to my eyes, and must have fallen, but that I got myself quickly away.

For in her face spoke the yearning that is born in every good woman's heart, nor ever satisfied till the little, downy head, all her own, lies warm against her breast; and well she knew that no such ecstasy came within the conditions of her life. . . . Nay, as she brooded over the innocent face, something of anguished relief was there, as if she knew herself to have escaped a peril, beside which all that she had suffered was as nothing.

But I remember how she had said to me once 'And do these silly women think that all the

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fame in the world, is worth *one* little baby of one's very own, to love, and to love you?'

I never saw so hopeless, so desperate a courage in any creature, for she could even think for me, and try to cheer *me*, and sometimes persuaded me to walk abroad with her; as when formerly she took me by the hand and led me clean out of the indoor into the outdoor life, which hitherto had been a sealed book to me, and showed me the pleasures of life, showed me (for even such are to be found in the limited space of town) the glory of blood-red sunsets, of dewy mornings and clean outdoor exhalations, and scolded me for neglecting the whole panorama of earth, sea and sky, for the books and laboratory, and I knew that she was right. I began to feel a contempt for the life-work of the student, for books can only teach at second-hand what we should learn at first-hand for ourselves, they are but blurred echoes of life, as it really is, often false in the spirit, if true in the letter, and to every man a time must come when he throws them behind him, and goes out to mingle with the flesh and blood realities that palpitate all around him.

And now, once again, we walked together, and people looked at her still, but not for the light-

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some movement, the *gaieté de cœur* that had been like the pure spirit shining through the flesh, but because she was so very young to look so entirely without hope and happiness.

Yet God gives compensations, even to his most broken hearted, and a daily tribute is poured daily into the hand of the fair of face, the gentle voiced ones of the earth, so profound and sweet is the unbidden satisfaction of that craving for beauty which is shared by the lowest and highest among us, and implanted in us originally by God.

And so, as I have said, we sometimes walked together, two distracted souls that yet knew a keen, sweet joy that we were together; and one day, when the white, and azure, and yellow of the spring flowers lay upon the grass like foam behind the railings, we turned our backs upon the people, walking on and on, scarce heeding where we went, till we stood on the self-same spot where she had made her timid bid for happiness, and where, in my arrogance, I had fiercely resented that she should know so much of love, and so quickly, as if it were a dull lesson to be learned painfully, word by word, instead of a glorious message flashed in one second from heart to heart.

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'Mine eyes were blinded, I could not see. . . . well, it had been our first and last outspoken talk on love; for never after had it been mentioned between us, never would be. . . .

I heard a low sound beside me . . . it was Ninga weeping.

'You break my heart . . . you break my heart,' she said, between her low sobs, 'when you look like that. . . . Oh! my brave one, my dear, my comforter, my shield, my more than brother, always for others, never for yourself—you who are, over and over again, worth us all!'

I shook my head, for I dared not look at her, or touch the hand that had trembled out to me, for anguish had made us to each other what no mere passion ever could, and when last we stood here, we had both been free, man and maiden, and we had both loved one another, and I did not know it, and what might have been all pure music had been turned by my madness into discord.

'Child!' I said at last, 'yours may be one of those lives (ay, and mine) made for we know not what purpose—a drop of dew on the grass—a shadow on the field—yet somewhere, somehow, used in God's economy, . . . if you have

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suffered and borne bravely, you have not lived in vain.'

Oh! words, futile and idle, as we looked at the water running at our feet, and longed passionately to lie clasped in each other's arms beneath it!

'Love one another,' I said, 'not oneself—but one another. There is nothing else . . . that is the first and the last word,' so I spake, scarce knowing what I said, only that I must comfort her, and she understood, as she ever did, the inner memory of any foolish words of mine.

As we turned our faces homewards — *home!* she threw herself into the deadly silence between us with the gallant pluck, the decision that would have made her the inspired leader of any forlorn hope, and talked of this thing and that, but most of all of Nature, whom she loved.

'For as to saying that we and Nature, however we may disagree, are not one, it is ridiculous. Does not our intense joy in her every phase prove we are akin? Will a jewel, a silk, a piece of man's handiwork, give us the thrill—the human warmth that some flower or sunset does? They *may* to a few miserable perverted souls—but the

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one is the base enjoyment of greed, of acquisition—' suddenly she stopped and looked at me, the birth of an idea in her eyes.

'Jasper is dead!' she cried, but I made no sign, only I felt my face stiffen; 'he would have claimed these jewels if he were alive—they have never even crossed my mind till to-day! I wondered what Arthur meant the other day when he asked me why I never wore "*them*;" and he was angry when I put on your gifts, and called me a fool.'

We were moving on again now, but I had nothing to say; if perjure myself I must, I never did so unnecessarily, and without looking at me, I think she understood that I had come to the limit of my strength, for, under cover of her cloak, she gently took my cold hand and pressed it to her colder lips, then talked of indifferent matters till we reached the house.

CHAPTER VI

‘ She did not weep at all,
But closelier did she cling,
And turned her face, and looked as if
She saw some frightful thing.’

FOR I knew that struggle as I might to find a way for Ninga out of the thralldom in which I had bound her, lo! there was no way save through the gates of death, nor upon earth could any man loose the chain that held these two hapless young people together.

Yes, Arthur's death alone could free her, or her own; and as the days passed, it seemed to me that they, once fellow travellers on one road, had changed places, that she was hastening, hurrying to outstrip him, as if resolved to reach that bourne first,* and pass in without him—free.

He, on the other hand, was as one suddenly arrested—called back in the tide of ill-health—it was as if the strange spirit, that by force had entered into his body, were growing accustomed

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to its quarters, and ceased to torment him. Yet better, methought, was his former state of restlessness than this contented acquiescence in his degradation; and as the colour returned to his cheek, and he began to regain the flesh he had lost, his features became stamped with a certain coarseness that I knew had been in Jasper's nature, though he had suffered but little of it to appear in his expression.

Have you ever seen a bad man's influence creep into a woman's soul, bit by bit, till it has invaded all, and stamped his own bestial likeness upon it? It is a crueller sight to watch than the gradual murder of a child, and, with torture, I waited for signs in Ninga of the subtle deterioration that might be going forward in her; but, watch as I might, I could find no signs of the spoiler, and in her every look and word I saw how the pure, lofty spirit was still unchanged.

Habitually now he spoke of subjects before me, and in her presence, that the old Arthur would not have dreamed of mentioning; and all the delicate reserve, the unspoken rules that govern a man's words in the presence of good women, were flung away, while he displayed

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an overt worship of her body at the expense of her spirit, that to such a woman as Ninga was the keenest outrage he could put upon her.

He forced her to dress in a way that displayed her beauty to the fullest advantage. She must unveil the shining satin of her neck and arms each night at dinner, and he must bring his new friends—men whom I did not know—to gaze at, and appreciate her, and the more evident the effect she produced upon them, the greater was his own brute satisfaction. To be sure, he owned her, but he seemed to wish to share and mingle his admiration of her with other men and—though immodest in dress, or look, or word, he could not make her, how many a weaker soul would have been tarnished by the air she breathed, how many would have advanced a step or two on the path along which she was being thrust by her husband's eager, careless hands! '*As the husband is, so is the wife. . . .*' No, no, a thousand times no, it *should* not be so!

And I stood by and saw it all — sat silent while my blood was on fire at the outrage beneath which she writhed — heard unmoved

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such things as, but a few months since, would have seemed incredible to me from Arthur's lips; yet neither interfered nor upbraided him, for I knew that he was not responsible for himself, that he was simply what mine and other wicked hands had made him.

And hateful as the company of these men was, all with some subtle moral taint upon them impossible to describe, I endured their presence as a lesser evil than those absences, often prolonged until far into the night, in which Arthur had lately indulged.

How she tried to keep him at home! How she laid herself out to please him, read to him, sang to him — nay, how she even coarsened herself outwardly to attract and bind him, using her every provoking wile and charm to keep him from the company and influences that seemed each day to accelerate his degradation!

If he were bent upon perdition, then no touch of hers, no look or word, should help him. Mutinous and capricious as she was — and as by nature all charming women are — she could effacé herself in a stern duty and devotion, which was rather that of a mother towards a

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hopelessly erring child, than of a young wife to the man who had sworn to love and protect her.

Often in the evenings we sat together, awaiting his return, with a dread that each prolonged absence only intensified, yet no word of anxiety or complaint crossed her lips; and I knew that she had resolved to bear her burden as I must mine—apart.

Nevertheless, such was her resolution, we talked, and calmly, too, on many subjects, during those long hours, and I got to know more of her mind, if but little more of her character, than I had hitherto done. And a singularly clear and vigorous mind it was—original, too; so that she would have made a bright companion to a clever man, and might have been looked up to as a genius by a dull one. With her, as with so many women, her affections had at first completely ruled her, but now her intellect asserted itself, and ruled them. For first the young blood has its way—then if there is a brain, it asserts itself, and keeps guard over the life and character, as with Ninga.

But neither wit, youth, nor beauty could by one hair's breadth influence the unhappy creature, who every day fell deeper and deeper before our eyes

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with a fearful rapidity, too, that suggested the headlong rush of a runaway horse, or the escape of some terrific force over which all control had been lost.

‘I can’t stop,’ a despairing, self-loathing drunkard said to me once; and Arthur could not stop; the reins of self-government had fallen from his hands, and only some violent restraint from without could hold him.

For I knew how secretly by prayer, and tender entreaty, she strove to turn him; how she stooped herself even to the dust that she might prevail with him; how, by exercising the influence that had once overborne Jasper’s, she now struggled to overcome it again, but in vain. It was Jasper’s self now, not merely his abstract power over another mind, and she had no weapons wherewith to grapple with the demon, and cast him out. She had long ago given up studying those works of mine, for they could not help her, and as we sat waiting up for him one night, I said to her, ‘Ninga, to-morrow I shall speak to Arthur.’

A look of horror and anger flashed across the unutterable sadness of her young face.

‘You shall not,’ she said, very low — ‘you

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dare not; and where Arthur goes, I will go also.'

'Listen,' I said, feeling as if a knife were in my hand, with which I was about to hack and hew her delicate flesh; 'Arthur has lately become something more than a mere drunkard; he is a confirmed opium eater.'

I paused; but she neither spoke, nor even by a look signified assent.

'Soon he will begin to dream dreams; then he will have fits of shuddering horror, in which the thought of suicide will alternate with mad longings for more of the accursed stuff; his brain — already weak — will become affected, and sooner or later he will die an idiot.'

'Jasper was an opium eater,' she said, in a calm, strange voice.

'Yes,● I said; 'and its only effect upon him was to make his mind more clear and luminous, though he must have suffered for it in the long run if he had—' I paused abruptly. 'But Arthur has attacked the habit with a violence that Jasper would have shrunk from. Ay, for Arthur's fall is a race in miniature. Some men pause between each downward step; but he does not, he makes scarcely any perceptible

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pause in his gradations. From sluggard to drunkard, from drunkard to opium eater, from thence— Ah, the one touch of purity that keeps him from falling deeper is Arthur, not Jasper.'

'The habit was Jasper's,' said Ninga, 'and Arthur is not responsible. If I can bear to live with him—live with the very voice and thoughts of the man I loathe—cannot you put up with him for the few hours of the day in which you have his company?'

'It is for his own sake and yours,' I said, cut to the heart by her tone; 'and have I not loved him too?'

'Forgive me!' she said. 'But now listen—listen to me. I have prayed, and pray always, and will continue to pray, that he may be released from the evil spirit that possesses him, and something *here* tells me that it has done its worst. When it has brought him to his crowning degradation, then God will suffer it no more, but cast it out, and Arthur will be our Arthur himself again. But it must come from God alone; no puny efforts of ours, no attempt at force will prevail.'

There was something unutterably pure and solemn in her looks and voice as she spoke, and

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a strange peace and hope fell like a dew upon my soul.

It was morning when we heard his stumbling steps without, ay, and something else that brought me suddenly to my feet, and made me push Ninga back, as she would have come with me.

‘Do not stir—I command you,’ I said so sternly that she stood motionless for a moment, then resumed her seat as I passed out, and shut the door behind me.

There was Arthur, and with him a poor painted travesty of a woman. . . . if such a sight do not appeal to a man’s pity and charity beyond all piteous sights on earth, then may God forgive him . . . and I took her arm gently as I led her out, and gave her money, then I went back to Arthur, who, drowsy and sleepy, had taken no heed of what I did.

Did she know? Her eyes seemed to say to me, ‘That was Jasper, not Arthur,’ as she passed up the staircase, her slender figure bowed beneath the weight of the man who leaned upon her.

CHAPTER VII

‘Myself, I named him once below,
And all the souls that damnèd be
Leaped up at once in anarchy,
Clapped their hands, and danced for glee.’

AT this time, had not my brain been hardier and tougher than that of most men, I must have gone mad, or fled like a coward from the sight of scenes that I was powerless to prevent. Ay, but I must have taken with me the inward hell of which Ninga knew nothing, and that was but one degree less bearable than the witnessing of her torments; and under the double strain I grew gaunt and haggard, attracting to myself a sympathy that was the last drop of aggravation in my already brimming cup.

Seldom as I went abroad, and few as my friends were, Job himself could not have aroused more commiseration than I did. Some thought I had

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lost my fortune, others my wits. I was accused of a secret marriage with my cook, and her consequent neglect to supply me with nourishing food ; or I was taking to heart the fruitlessness of the experiments, in prosecuting which I had worn away all my best years.

‘ Master,’ signed Silence to me one day, ‘ you must come into the laboratory again. You must work, or you will go mad.’

I looked at him, and my heart smote me. He, too, had changed terribly, and his huge frame had nearly the gauntness of a skeleton ; yet he bore himself erect, and his eye was fearless as mine. Criminals we both might be, but fear we did not know, nor did contempt mingle with the glances we threw upon each other.

‘ Yes ; I will come,” I said, and gradually, the work that at first was but little better than a treadmill aroused my interest, and now gave me some precious moments of oblivion.

Falstaff reappeared, docile, uncomprehending, skilful as ever, but now and again I detected him in stolen glances towards a certain object in the room, glances in which there was a curious blending of satisfaction and struggling dread. But Arthur, who on some rare occasion lounged in,

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produced an effect upon the man nothing short of extraordinary. He ceased to perform his duties, and an expression of lively horror overspread his vacuous features ; and once, when Arthur accidentally touched him, he jumped back, looking wildly at his hand, as though some loathsome thing had touched it.

About that time I received a letter from Jonathan—short, bitter, and to the point.

‘My daughter has disobeyed me,’ he said, ‘and you deliberately aided and abetted her. I need not comment on the indecent haste of her courtship and marriage, or the deceit that would not suffer me even to know of her plans until they were consummated, but I cannot believe that a step taken with so much rashness and self-will can lead to happiness, for the disobedient daughter makes the deceitful wife.’

Yet, surely, had he seen her then, he must have confessed that she had atoned bitterly enough for her haste, and have spared her those heavy words that, from a parent, will haunt a child’s heart with dull and strange persistence ; and once I said to her, ‘Ninga, why do you

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not go and see your father? The sea voyage might be the saving of Arthur, and, in time to come, you would be glad that you had parted friends with him.'

She sat for a while without speaking, and I thought that never sure would bride carry a sadder face, or a frailer shape to her father's house than Ninga; and yet so proud she looked withal, that I could not picture her there with her sorry bridegroom.

'If it were for Arthur's health,' she said slowly; 'but if—if—' she ceased abruptly, then went on, 'My father is a harsh, stern man, and no one shall be unkind to Arthur.'

I knew then that she looked upon his reformation as hopeless, and that even her trust in the miracle she had prayed for, was growing faint and weak.

'We might go away,' she said presently, 'but not to *him*. Arthur would be better away from those bad friends; but, on the other hand, while we are here, I have you to depend upon.'

'And I cannot help you, Ninga,' I said sadly, even while a thrill of sweetness shot through me at the thought of her secret rest upon my presence.

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‘You can—you do,’ she said; ‘but *his* case is beyond us. Only God can heal him—and break him,’ she added, with a hard, dry sob, ‘for when he is well—when he is himself again, he will die!’

‘No, no,’ I cried, ‘there is more mercy surely in Heaven than that.’

‘And so I will not blame him,’ she said, so low that I hardly heard her. ‘Jasper has stolen that brave, gentle spirit away, but he shall not steal away my love, and when my boy comes back, he shall find that I was faithful to him through everything, and tried to save him.’

It was with the memory of her looks and words fresh upon me, that I sought and found Arthur knocking about the billiard balls, and yawning heavily, as he often did now.

Unshaven, with bloodshot eyes, and shaking hand, he faced me, perhaps finding something unusual in my face, for an evil sneer about his lips brought Jasper up vividly before my eyes.

‘Can you spare me a few minutes?’ I said.

He looked at me suspiciously, then his mouth set itself in passionate, sullen lines.

‘If you’re going to lecture,’ he said, ‘I shall go. I’m my own master, and I’ll do as I please.’

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Ninga never scowls at me, or looks at me as if I were pitch; and if a man's wife is satisfied, he is nobody else's business but his own.'

'Arthur,' I said urgently, 'give up that opium. It is killing you.'

'I sha'n't!' he said, in a voice of a spoiled, tetchy child. 'It's the only things that makes me feel comfortable and happy—I was always restless before I took it, and suffered more than you or even Ninga ever guessed at. How can you blame me?' he burst out, turning upon me looks of fury. 'Heaven knows what infernal tricks you practised on me that night, I've never been the same man since; and though you forced me to keep silence, and ask no questions, you can't prevent my thinking about it, and having my suspicions.'

'What are they?' I said, looking steadily at him.

His eyes, always contracted by opium, now narrowed to a mere slit, and a look of cunning overspread his features.

'What have you done with Jasper?' he said. 'Poor devil, I treated him badly that night, but you treated him worse!'

'You are mad!' I said; but, in the glass be-

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yond, I saw my face livid, with the stamp of . guilt upon it.

Arthur laughed harshly.

‘Sometimes I think it was I who went away that night, and Jasper who stayed; that there was some horrible jugglery done between you and Silence; for, if some hints he gave me long before meant anything, you and he have some secret by which you are able to make men’s souls play at general post, only I couldn’t get him to tell me how it was done.’

He had begun slowly, as if with difficulty taxing his memory, but he ended with the careless levity that of late had become habitual to him; and, taking up his cue, recommenced his solitary game.

‘And then there’s that chest—somehow it draws me, ‘I can’t keep away from it, and my fingers itch to unlock it—it’s something quite new that locking up—have you hidden Jasper there?’ he added, with a strange look, ‘and do you mean to put me there to join him some day — and marry Ninga? For it was you she always loved—only you could never see it. Fancy an old buffer cutting out two good-looking chaps like Jasper and I! But, after all, I don’t think you would

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harm me; what's more, Ninga would not let you.'

The disagreeable inflection of his voice was Jasper's very own, and for once seemed to startle him.

'Odd how my voice has altered!' he said; 'but, then, I'm altered altogether. I've sometimes thought Jasper put some drug or other in my whisky and water that night — those Indians know some strange things!'

But the conversation I had myself sought was becoming too much for me, and his last remarks were addressed to air.

BOOK V



ARTHUR

CHAPTER I

‘They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes ;
It had been strange, e’en in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.’

FROM that moment a change came over Arthur. It seemed as though, having broken the oath of silence he had sworn to me, a flood of hitherto dormant thoughts and speculations flowed unchecked through his mind, all dyed with a suspicion that he did not attempt to hide, and in which he included Silence. Constantly, when the deaf mute and I were at work together, Arthur would enter abruptly; and once, when we had barred the door, we were startled presently by seeing him close to us, having entered by the alley at the back of the house.

But if he expected to surprise us in nefarious practices, or dallying with black art, he was disappointed; nor could listening avail him much, when I held with Silence one of those dumb

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colloquies in which we conferred as man to man, and not as master and servant.

But in truth, this attitude of Arthur's gave me the greatest satisfaction, for it pointed to a reawakening in him of his natural self, to a rebellion against the hideous influences that so long had stifled him. He became less slothful, and his fatal habit slackened its hold on him, yet haggard, miserable, suspicious-looking wretch that he was, he appeared beautiful in Ninga's eyes and mine, after the sleek sensuality of his recent appearance and ways.

She had always a light hand with men, but it had need be of her lightest and firmest now, to guide this irritable, suffering, perturbed soul, that was like a ship whose rudder is lost, and who drifts hither and thither at the mercy of wind and sea. But no shipwrecked mariner had ever so true and soft a haven as had Arthur in Ninga's breast; no man so strong and brave a hand to cling to, even though beneath him his ship foundered in mid-ocean, and cruel though his lot might be, to me he was richer than the whole world, since he possessed Ninga.

So now Hope stole amongst us, a tricksy sprite that we had long wooed in vain, and vague and shadowy as was her presence, and pale the hues

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of her fluttering wings, we clung to her illusive presence, and would have shut our eyes sooner than confess that she had left us. And day by day, I studied Arthur as acutely and persistently as he studied me, and from time to time was rewarded by some word, some trace, like a half-forgotten landmark of his former self, and in my mind I likened him to a submerged city that showed here and there a spire, a minaret, or a lofty tree-top, rising out of the flood that had engulfed and effaced it.

Glimpses of his own noble mind, snatches of thought in his own generous and manly style, now and then escaped him; some glimmerings, too, of healthy ambition and interest in his old pursuits showed themselves fitfully, as if bit by bit he was reclaiming what had been lost, and he now manifested a hatred for those companions to whom he had formerly been so much attached.

Very gradually, too, but surely, his voice regained its original tones, and it was no longer Jasper who sate with us at the board—Jasper, whose hated voice pursued us; and I knew that from Ninga was lifted the burden of an unspeakable torture that I had only dimly guessed, and

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shuddered at, and my heart became light as air.

One day, as I passed downstairs, I found the door of the room Jasper had occupied, open, and saw Arthur standing with his back to me, and I advanced, and looked over his shoulder. He was gazing at the pile of portmanteaux, all strapped and ready for departure, that had been lying there for nearly five months.

‘Why has he not claimed them?’ said Arthur, turning sharply round on me.

I shrugged my shoulders.

‘It is strange,’ he said slowly; ‘it is more than strange! It is unlikely that a man should leave his own personal belongings, probably his papers, and other things of value, unclaimed. Have you any reason to think he is dead, sir?’ His eyes flashed the question into mine, and insisted upon a reply.

‘I should not be surprised,’ I said deliberately, ‘if he were.’

‘You know it?’ cried Arthur, seizing my arm in his excitement.

‘Everything points to such an hypothesis,’ I said calmly; ‘he was a scoundrel, a murderer, and whatever may have been his fate, he deserved it!’

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‘A murderer?’ repeated Arthur, in a voice of horror. ‘Oh, not that, sir! He was my friend, and I can’t forget that once I loved him, and once, I think, he loved me.’

‘So well,’ I said bitterly, ‘that—’ but I did not finish the sentence, and would have left him, but he stepped between the door and me, and shutting it, made me prisoner.

‘Matters cannot rest thus, sir!’ he said; and there was a dignity in his style and voice that startled me. ‘Jasper was staying here as your guest and my friend, and the fact of his having no relations in England who are likely to inquire for him, leaves the responsibility with us, of finding out what has become of him.’

He paused, and as I made no reply, he went on. ‘It is strange, but only one of the many strange things I have experienced lately, that I felt no curiosity whatever about him for a long while, though, curiously enough, I found myself thinking of Arthur Stanaforth as another person. But now I think continually of Jasper. He haunts me sleeping and waking—he cries out to me from some unknown place, and I must find him, or I shall never know rest again.’

‘Let the dead past bury its dead,’ I said; ‘do

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not seek to disturb it, or know too much. You owe him nothing; to you he was the foulest traitor that ever took in vain the name of friend.'

'Then he is dead,' said Arthur, mournfully, and he bowed his head. 'Whatever his faults may have been, I forgive him. But can you tell me, sir, for my own comfort and rest of mind, that no one in this house was instrumental in his death?'

We faced each other, two pale, resolute-eyed men.

'I will tell you nothing,' I said, and thrust him aside and passed out.

From that day, Arthur spoke no more of Jasper, but the improvement that had been visible in him faded; he grew sullen and morose, even to Ninga, and dogged my footsteps persistently, but this gave me no uneasiness. Nevertheless, Silence and I set about some arrangements requiring care and secrecy, and that were on the eve of being carried out, when an event occurred that put to flight all our calculations, and brought about the very catastrophe we sought to avert.

It happened thus. The time was the hour between darkness and dawn, the scene was the

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laboratory, one door of which was locked, while the other had just given egress to the deaf mute, who had gone to see if all were in readiness for the removal about to take place.

Now I, left alone, and with my back towards the half-opened cupboard, and the door leading on the alley unlocked, lifted the iron-bound lid of the oaken chest, and stood musing, and looking down on what was within.

Light footsteps approached me, but I did not turn ; it was only Silence returning for the burden that for so many months had lain here unsuspected.

I felt a hand laid on my arm, but it was not black, and it was not Silence who peered over my shoulder, and stood looking down with me at Jasper's pallid face, all distorted with hate and mockery, that peered up at us from below.

CHAPTER II

'The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away ;
I could not draw my eyes from theirs
Nor turn them up to pray.'

My hand fell from the lid, and as I drew myself erect, I saw in the doorway an arrested figure of doubt and dismay, and beneath the outstretched arm of that towering shape, the half-grinning, half-fearful, but wholly impish face of Falstaff.

Arthur never moved.

'His face was drawn back on itself
With horror and huge pain,'

as a man's might be who gazed on his own dead presentment, and knew not whether it, or he, were his very actual self . . . but soon a long shiver passed through his body, as if some wandering spirit escaped it, and from that moment the last vestige of the unholy influence that had been upon him, ceased.

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‘How did he die?’ cried Arthur, suddenly, in a loud, clear voice; ‘why is his body hidden here, and who hid it?’

I saw Silence thrust Falstaff out, and shut the door on him; then, swiftly as a shadow, he came up to us, and stood beside Arthur, who dragged his gaze from Jasper to look at him.

‘I did it,’ he signed, and his flashing eyes and working features corroborated his signs. ‘I hated him, and I killed him, and I hid him here.’

‘No,’ I said doggedly; ‘it was I.’

I spoke by word of mouth, but Silence, watching my lips, understood.

‘I, and I only, did this thing,’ signed the deaf mute; and as he said it, Arthur dropped the lid with a crash, and turned towards me.

‘And so,’ he said, ‘all the story you told me of that night was false; or, if it be true that he attempted my life, you went a step farther, you and Silence, and slew him.’

I bowed my head, and answered him nothing,

But Silence moved nearer, and signed, ‘I hated him! It was my thought, my deed, and I do not regret it.’

His attitude was not that of servant to master, but of man to man, as he made this avowal;

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something lofty, even noble, shone in the steady gaze he turned upon Arthur.

‘And Mr Saul helped you?’ said the young man, almost inarticulately.

For a moment Silence made no reply.

‘The crime was mine,’ he said, with dignity, ‘both in conception and in act. Mr Saul could not have prevented it, although he might have—hindered.’

The last words were signed involuntarily, but Arthur caught them.

‘So you looked on and saw it done!’ he cried, in bitterest contempt and scorn; ‘you would not put out a hand to save him! Your guest and *my* friend done to death between the pair of you! O God! that I had died rather than lived to see this day!’

My heart ached for the boy—for his broken trust and faith in me, for the destruction of all that he had held most worthy of honour since his birth; but to tell him the truth would be to take away his last chance of life and happiness, and at no hazard must that truth be told.

He again lifted the lid, and looked long and earnestly at the dead face below. All was forgotten and forgiven now, death had blotted out

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every fault, and not as hated rivals, but as familiar friends, the two were once more face to face.

A groan broke from Arthur's breast.

'Say that it was an accident—that you did not mean him to die!' cried Arthur, passionately; 'your nature cannot have changed like this in a single day! Yet you traduced him, you called him murderer, when you knew—'

'He *was* a murderer,' I said, 'and he died the fit death of one.'

'Whom did he kill?' said Arthur, sternly, 'and are you God Himself, that you should arrogate to yourself the right of an avenger? By every law, human and divine, this man had a claim upon you, yet in your own house you could aid and abet his death!'

He turned swiftly to Silence, who had understood only the drift of what had been said, and addressed him.

'Your master says that Mr Jasper was a murderer,' he signed; 'whom did he kill?'

The deaf mute made no reply. There was more expression in the dead face below than in his.

'Answer!' cried Arthur, imperiously.

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But he might as easily have extracted a sign out of a carved image as from this man.

‘So you will not speak,’ said Arthur, slowly. ‘But you shall be forced to yet!’

He dropped the lid, and took a few hasty steps away ; then, returning, cried, in a sharp, astonished voice, ‘Why did you keep his body here? You could have got rid of it so easily. So many are carried in and out, and no one would have been any the wiser!’

And he laughed harshly.

‘And not one who was ever brought in, or taken out, ever deserved the gallows so richly as this one,’ I said.

‘So you say!’ he cried bitterly ; ‘but he is dead, and cannot speak for himself, or he might tell another story. Is it *his* spirit that has possessed me since his death, crying out in me for vengeance? He swore to me that he would come back and stay, and, oh, my God! he *has* stayed.’

He threw himself down on the chest in an agony of horror, grief and pain, and in that last paroxysm, nature exhausted itself, and he fainted away.

Silence lifted him in his arms as if he had been

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a baby, and laid him on a rude couch at some distance, but made no effort to restore him.

Swift as light he unlocked the outer door, and admitted Falstaff with his burden, and in a very few moments the embalmed corpse had been conveyed from the chest to the oblong box, had been borne through the door, and so through the alley to the covered cart waiting without.

No driver was visible; the horse's head was deep in his nosebag; and, when the burden had been stowed away, Falstaff scrambled up to the seat, took the reins in his hands, and drove away.

Perhaps the cold current of air through the open door had revived Arthur, for when Silence and I entered, he was trying to rise, but fell back as he made the effort.

I had made up my mind how to act. Ninga must never know the truth, or, if he told her, I would swear that he was the victim of an hallucination, and, as the proof was gone, he would find it difficult to gainsay me.

I rapidly conveyed my decision to Silence, who had closed the door, and now busied himself in preparing for the table a subject upon which we had been at work the preceding day, after which

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he hastily kindled fresh lights, Arthur the while staring at him with wild eyes, as one who struggles to command his reason.

But when I joined Silence, and methodically continued my work of dissection, the poor boy lost all control of himself, and came staggering up to me.

‘How can you do it?’ he said. ‘How can you dare to stay in the same room with *that*?’

And he pointed towards the chest.

‘My dear Arthur,’ I said, looking at him closely and keenly, ‘you are ill, overwrought to-night. What is there here that I need be afraid of?’

For answer he walked unsteadily to the chest and opened it, peering down at its emptiness, but we others seemed not to heed him, but continued our work at the table.

‘What have you done with him—with Jasper?’ he cried in a loud, hoarse voice, after a pause that seemed to me an eternity.

‘With Jasper?’ I said, looking round. ‘What should I have to do with him? Am I his keeper?’

‘No,’ he said; ‘you are only his murderers—you and Silence!’

And he turned upon the deaf mute a look

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beneath which the man seemed visibly to wither and shrink.

‘You are raving, Arthur,’ I said coldly. ‘Probably you have exceeded your usual dose of opium, and you know that opium dreams are as vivid as actual fact. And so you have been dreaming that we murdered Jasper?’

Arthur stood gazing at me as if he doubted the evidence of his senses.

‘You mean to deny,’ he said, ‘that here, not a quarter of an hour ago, I saw Jasper’s dead body—his murdered body?—for no man who died a fair death ever came with such a bloodless, awful look on his face as he had; that Silence swore he had committed the deed, and you owned to complicity in it? You deny all this?’

‘Everything. You imagined it all.’

Arthur laughed wildly.

‘I am not mad yet,’ he said, ‘though I well might be. I have watched you all day, and felt sure that you meditated something strange to-night. After you thought I had gone to bed, I came here, hid myself in the cupboard, and watched. You locked yonder door behind you—it is locked now.’

‘You must have locked it yourself,’ I said

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coolly, and continued my work with a firm hand.

‘Oh, this is too much!’ cried Arthur, with a voice and gesture of frenzy. ‘Have I not been made your sport, your creature, long enough? Have you not, by some unholy devilry, given me Jasper’s spirit, when you murdered Jasper’s body? And now you tell me to my face I am mad! I will go to Ninga—to Ninga!’

His voice faltered and broke. It was piteous to hear the note of dependence in the once strong man’s voice.

‘Ay, go to her,’ I said, turning fiercely upon him—‘go and crush out the last spark of life and hope in her tender, tortured heart! Jasper’s life was a worthless one; hers is precious beyond price, and meddle with it if you dare!’

He paused on his way to the door, the poor, pale lad, and stood for awhile as one who finds a longed-for support and comfort suddenly snatched from him; then he pulled himself together with a forlorn pride that made my heart ache, unlocked the door, and went out.

CHAPTER III

‘As on the driving cloud the shining bow,
That gracious thing made up of tears and light,
’Mid the wild rack and rain that slants below,
Stands smiling forth, unmoved, and freshly bright.’

I WAS playing the game with a high hand, but only by such play could I hope to carry it through.

Arthur kept his room for two days, and did not see the papers, or he would have read of the strange discovery, in a corner of Barnes Common, of a box containing the body of a man, young, and of very dark complexion, and dressed in evening clothes, whom it was at first supposed had been murdered, but the medical experts decided that the main artery in his right arm had been opened, whether by himself or some other person, and he had bled to death; subsequently he had been embalmed, and kept in hiding for some weeks or months.

No one came forward to identify him, nor

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did the police ever find any clue to those who had conveyed him to the lonely spot where he was found, but they gave him Christian burial, and the sinful hand, and restless body found peace at last.

Now it may seem strange, incredible, that I should have kept here all this time the actual proof of our crime, when it could so easily have been disposed of with the other *débris* of our experiments. And yet there had been method in my madness, for had I disposed of Jasper's body, and subsequent events, or the interposition of some suspicious relation traced his disappearance to my house, I should have been accused of deliberate murder, whereas the only wound in his body (a trifling one) was made by the introduction of the apparatus that carried his living blood to the cold body of the man whose life currents he had drained. Silence and Falstaff alone knew of its presence there, Arthur could not possibly get access to it, as it was hermetically sealed, and the key hidden away in a place I alone knew of. That I had not guarded against Arthur's sudden entry at the very moment we were removing Jasper (for with Arthur's aroused suspicions I dared keep

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the embalmed body no longer) was due to one of those extraordinary oversights that again and again have undone the best laid-plans.

Ninga was safe. So much I knew when, on the third day, I heard her laugh.

The sound was so strange, so new to me, for so long had she been like the starving bird whose song is frozen in him, that I could have wept for joy as I heard her. Soon she herself came dancing through the hall, with a soft ball of a kitten cuddled to her throat, and youth and gaiety upspringing in her once more, as water will bubble from a spring when once the reeds that choked it are removed.

Perhaps my grave face startled her, for she drew me back into the room she had just left, and said, 'I am happy, so happy, for Arthur is himself—his very self again, and Jasper is quite gone.'

'But he is ill,' I said anxiously.

'Yes, that is inevitable. But he will soon get strong again,' she added, with such supreme faith that no one could have had the heart to try and shake it.

She was no longer a woman haunted by a dreadful presence; she moved and spoke like one

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free, but my fetters were not so easily removed ; moreover, a chill foreboding that her joy was but short-lived, overbore me.

And I could not but think of Arthur, alone, battling with his weakness, and his horror at the discovery he had made, with no one to turn to for a word of sympathy or comprehension. And his utter dependence upon me, and, more than that, the helplessness of Ninga, must still further torture and paralyze him : but to this last difficulty I resolved to put an end that very day.

‘Tell Arthur that I must see him,’ I said to her ; and I turned away and left her, already chilled and saddened by my unresponsive, dull looks. But it was not until an hour later that she came to me, and went up with me to Arthur’s room.

At the door she left me, and I went in alone. He was sitting by the window, with idle hands folded before him, but when I approached he got up respectfully, but did not offer his hand or look at me.

And I, too, did not speak, for one look at his face had told me how, in the fearful conflict between good and evil that had torn and

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rent him, the body had been shattered even while the soul triumphed, and that he was—dying.

‘I wanted to see you, sir,’ he said, speaking without falter, ‘and you wished to see me; but perhaps you will let me have my say first. I cannot’—he stopped, then began again to speak—‘remain in your house, eat your bread, take your hand, while I know what I do know. I have no money, and I will not take yours; but I cannot take Ninga away to starve; and so I ask you to keep her here, and make her as happy as you can.’

‘Where will you go?’ I said, turning my back on him lest he should see my face.

He shook his head.

I turned, the sunny head was bowed, his wasted frame was racked by the dry, tearless sobs of a man whose heart was breaking.

‘Arthur, *my boy*,’ I said, and would have laid my hand on his shoulder, but dared not, and stood apart till the brief convulsion passed. ‘Ninga must go with you,’ I said, when I felt myself able to command my voice, ‘or I myself will go away, and you two can remain here.’

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Arthur threw back his head with a gesture as of one who suffocates.

‘No, no,’ he said; ‘that is impossible. But why should not Ninga stay?’

For the first time he looked me earnestly in the face, and I felt the blood slowly mounting to my brow.

‘Because she is your wife, not mine,’ I said; ‘but let her decide.’ And I moved to the bell, and rang it.

I could feel that Arthur’s eyes never left my face, and when Ninga came, and looked in surprise from one to the other, I found myself forced to speak, since he would not.

‘Ninga,’ I said, ‘Arthur and I have disagreed, and he is going away. He wishes you to remain with me.’ I paused, for a burning blush had flamed suddenly over her face, and she trembled violently, like a guilty or a stricken thing. ‘But I tell him that you must go with him!’

She put one hand to her shaking lips, then, with a low moan of agony, she threw herself down on her knees, and clutching my hand, sobbed out, ‘*Don’t* send me away! *Don’t* send me away!’

I saw only her face, white as snow, lifted

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towards me, what she saw in mine I cannot tell. . . . I know not if, in that supreme moment, love overpowered affection, and the stifled passion in our hearts burst forth, but as her head sank, and flooded my hand with the bright silk of her hair, I looked at Arthur, and knew that he knew the truth.

So might a blind man look when he suddenly recovers his sight only to discover his best friend and his wife unfaithful to him . . . from that sad, betrayed look I shrank, seeming to lose all self-respect and honour, and unclosing my hand from Ninga, left there thus alone together.

CHAPTER IV

‘Desolation
Too great to be one soul’s particular lot.’

AN hour later Arthur came to me, and, all humiliated as I was, I rose and faced him.

‘You have loved each other always,’ he said; ‘it was I who came between you. And if I did not know you to be what you are, I could find it in my heart to rejoice that there is happiness in store for her yet, after all she has suffered and endured for me.’ I made him no answer, and he went on, ‘The hand of death is upon me, and I have only a few days, perhaps only a few hours, to live. To die is nothing, but I feel the bitterness of leaving her in the care of one ‘whom she believes in beyond all other human beings, and who is—unworthy!’

‘No,’ I said, ‘not unworthy; guilty of some moments of madness, if you will, but of no premeditated crime; and now you shall have the

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truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth !'

.
It was a ghastly story that I told him, but long before it was ended, he had taken my hand, and peace lay between us. But the emotions called into play during my recital were too much for his weak frame, he fainted when it was over, and I carried him to the bed from which he never rose again. It was towards dawn that he passed away, and the manner of his passing was thus:—

Ninga was reading to him out of the New Testament, or rather from memory, for tears blotted the page, though her voice was steady. She sat in the shadow of the curtain, but one hand lay in his, and presently he lifted it to his cold lips, and she ceased to read.

'Little, faithful, strong hand,' he said, 'that strove to save a drowning man, and, all worthless as he was, brought him to land at last, it will have safer anchorage in this stronger one,' and then he beckoned me nearer, and clasped my fingers over hers.

And in that act, without any other farewell word, he died.

CHAPTER V

‘Delights so full, if unalloyed with grief,
Were ominous. In these strange, dread events
Just Heaven instructs us with an awful voice,
That Conscience rules us, e’en against our choice.’

NARRATIVE OF SILENCE, THE DEAF MUTE

I CAN write, but I can't spell; but Mr Sabine will correct that. He wants me to write down facts; here they are:—

One night last January—I forget the date—I had settled with Falstaff to come to the laboratory at eleven o'clock to help me with an operation that I wished to do unknown to master.

As he sometimes came in late, and took the key of the door away with him when he went, I slipped in about ten, hid myself in the cupboard, and went to sleep.

I can always trust myself to wake up like a clock at the moment I wish, and at eleven

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o'clock exactly—for I heard the church clock strike—I awoke. There was a light in the room, and Mr Arthur was sitting in a chair in his shirt sleeves, with Mr Jasper leaning over him. At first I thought he was only asleep, but as Mr Jasper straightened himself up, and I saw his face, I knew that there had been mischief, and I slipped out of the cupboard, and ran towards them.

One glance was enough. Mr Arthur was bathed in blood—had bled to death through the severing of the main artery in his right arm—and in his left hand held the lancet that had made the wound.

But that hand had never used it. One look at the devilish malignity and triumph of Mr Jasper's face assured me of so much, and the next moment I had seized him, and we were grappling together.

I was stronger than he, but to master a man is one thing, to secure him is another; but by great good fortune Falstaff knocked at the outer door in the nick of time, and together we had soon bound, and tied him to the table, and then I was able to turn to my poor young master, dead ! in a 'sea of blood, and my cursed heavy sleep

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had prevented me from saving him! Dead! and that devil yonder was laughing at me as he lay bound, for he knew that no one could prove he had killed Mr Arthur, for that the very second I woke up, I had come out of my hiding-place, and that I had seen nothing!

I don't know what I did for a few minutes—I did not touch him, but I know that I was mad.

Then, as I looked from one to the other—from the living to the dead—I remembered the experiment my master had tried in the autumn of last year. The thought came to me straight from Satan, and it set my brain on fire; but I did not hesitate for a moment as to what I should do.

I drew Falstaff aside, and when I told him, he made no difficulty, but showed a ferocious satisfaction, and set about the necessary preparations at once. These took some time: but when all was ready, we unbound Mr Jasper, removed his coat, then placed him in a chair near the dead body, and secured him again.

He was an Oriental, and his calm was something wonderful; but he did not in the least suspect what was coming.

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On a table behind him was a bottle of chloroform, and some fine linen. I saturated a piece of the stuff in the liquid, came behind him, and pressed it suddenly and closely over his nose and mouth. He gave one muffled shriek, struggled furiously for some moments, but at length sank under the spirit's influence, and was still.

Then the operation began, and was about half-way through, when I became aware that my master was in the room, and rushing forward to interrupt us.

I could neither sign to him, nor take my hands away from the life-and-death work that I was straining every nerve to fulfil. Had he snatched away the apparatus then, there would have been two dead men instead of one; but when quite close to us, he stopped short, seemed suddenly to comprehend the situation, and—helped.

We had urgently needed a third pair of hands, and with his skilled assistance the whole thing was carried swiftly through, and before long it was Mr Arthur who lived and breathed, and Mr Jasper lay dead before us.

For that crime, that fatal mistaken crime—

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for how could my sweet-blooded young master live with the blood of such a devil in him?— I alone am responsible; and my master, in intent, and in all but a few minutes of help (when hindrance would have been equally fatal), is innocent.

And I thank God now that my poor Mr Arthur is at rest at last; and perhaps, if there is another world, and he and I meet in it shortly—for, wherever he is, I go to seek him to-night—that he will find it in his heart to forgive me.

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NARRATIVE OF MR SABINE

In December 188—, I tried for the first time the experiment of restoring life to a dead animal by means that I forbear to dwell upon here, and the details of which I cannot give. Let it suffice that I established the fact that, given a drowned body,* or one drained of every drop of blood, I could—provided it were not diseased or bruised—hours after its becoming frozen and stiff in death, restore it to all the functions of breathing life.

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True, a costly price had to be paid for such restoration—it was literally a life for a life; but to me there was something appalling in this shifting of the vital spark at will, and I resolved not only never to use this power, but never to reveal to anyone the discovery I had made.

Silence and Falstaff alone shared the secret with me. The first I bound to secrecy; the second I knew to be incapable of either transmitting any information, or attempting any experiment whatever, without our supervision, and there the discovery rested, and might have done for ever, but for the cruel, cowardly murder of Arthur by Jasper on the night of which so much mention has been made.

When, moved by some constraining impulse, I left my study, and went to the laboratory to find the hideous operation in full play, my first sensation was one of ungovernable rage and horror, and I rushed forward to tear from Silence and his assistant the means by which they were introducing the blood of a living body into that of a dead one.

But Arthur's deathly face, and the look of malignancy indelibly stamped on Jasper's features,

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which were rapidly attaining a corpse-like tint, made me stop abruptly; and one look from the eyes of Silence told me the truth. The look was an extraordinary one, for hours of explanation could not more clearly have proved to me that Jasper was Arthur's murderer than that one lightning glance did; and then, God forgive me! I thought only of my poor slain lad, and helped with a will in that wicked work which, alas, alas! brought only a curse with its fruition, and was all in vain.

.

And Ninga?

Ninga never knew the truth, and never will know it; and Ninga is—happy.

THE END

